

ETERNAL JUSTIFICATION

In this volume, David Gay tackles the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of 'eternal justification'.

This relatively unknown warping of the biblical doctrine of justification is an ever-present danger for those who hold the doctrines of grace. The Puritans met the error, but it probably had its heyday – *until now, that is* – in the 1870s in England among the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. With the coming of the internet, however, it has now begun to reach a much wider audience. And if this teaching takes hold and grows, the effect on the preaching of the gospel will be unspeakably bad.

In order to do what he can about this possibility, Gay has written this book, in which he first sets out the biblical principles of justification and justifying faith. He then shows how hyper-Calvinism ruins both the justification and the faith, thus fatally damaging the biblical concept of conversion, and how this, inevitably, has a devastating effect on gospel addresses to sinners.

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Eternal Justification

*Gospel Preaching to Sinners
Marred by Hyper-Calvinism*

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Contents

Glossary	7
Introduction	9

The Principles

What Is Justification?	17
The Four Aspects of Justification	31
What Is Eternal Justification?	41
The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes	75
What Is Justifying Faith?	101
What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?	107
Eternal Justification and Addresses to Sinners	145

The Extracts with Comments

What Is Justification?	165
The Four Aspects of Justification	175
What Is Eternal Justification?	177
The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes	197
What Is Justifying Faith?	205
What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?	209
Eternal Justification and Addresses to Sinners	223
Source List	229

Glossary

Duty faith is the biblical doctrine that it is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility of all sinners to trust Christ, even though they have no ability to comply. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.

The free offer is the biblical doctrine that, even though Christ's atonement was neither intended for all, nor accomplished for all, we must invite all sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, promising them salvation if they do.

A **hyper-Calvinist** does not hold with the free offer or duty faith. Some hyper-Calvinists are knowingly so, but many are 'incipient', unwitting or *de facto* hyper-Calvinists; that is, while they accept the principles of the free offer, in practice they fail to preach it.

According to hyper-Calvinists, a **sensible** or **seeking sinner** is a regenerate sinner who, conscious of his sin and need of salvation, repents, and desires Christ. He is not trusting Christ, however. Even so, such a sinner is demonstrating that he must be elect. Although I use the term – I have to, since it is ubiquitous in the literature – I do not think the Bible warrants us to speak of such a sinner, certainly not as denominated by hyper-Calvinists. How such a sinner can be repentant and desirous of Christ – without trusting him – beats me, I am afraid. Those who use the term, 'seeking sinner', often misapply Matthew 7:7-11 (Luke 11:9-13) to the unconverted, when it is, in fact, a set of commands and promises to believers.

The hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of **eternal justification** is this: the elect are actually justified in God's decree in eternity, actually justified with and in Christ in his death on the cross and in his resurrection. When the sensible sinner believes, he receives the manifestation (confirmation, revelation, realisation), of his eternal justification, in his conscience. But he is no more justified after believing than before. He never was under the wrath of God. Whereas before believing, he had no assurance that he was right with God, he now has the felt sense of it.

Creature-power or **creature-merit** is the unbiblical notion that unregenerate sinners have the ability, the power, the will, in themselves by nature, to repent and turn to Christ in saving faith.

A **Sandemanian** thinks saving faith is nothing more than mental assent. If a sinner accepts the facts of the gospel, he is saved. To talk about the heart, or feelings, is to introduce works, and ruin the grace of God in salvation. The name comes from Robert Sandeman (1718-1771).

An **Amyraldian** thinks that Christ died for and redeemed all sufficiently, but effectually only for the elect. The name comes from Moise Amyraut (1596-1664).

When I speak of the **eschatological** aspect of the gospel, I am referring to the New Testament phrase **‘but now’** (or, in the context, ‘now’) (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10).¹ ‘But now’ carries enormous overtones. It refers to the massive change that God brought about in the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection, his ascension, and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The age of the law has gone. The age of the gospel has come. In short: God, in time, works out his eternal decree to save his elect, and thus exalt his Son in their final glorification. God decreed the redemption of his elect – the purpose, means and ends of their redemption – in eternity, but he is accomplishing it in time, as a part of history. Adam, the promise to Abraham, the law at Sinai, the coming, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, the return of Christ, and so on, are milestones in this historical process which is divided into two great ages, two great eras, two great dispensations or epochs – before Christ and after Christ, leaving aside the eternal age following the second coming of Christ – which lies outside history – to concentrate on ‘this present time’ (Rom. 8:18) in contrast to the age preceding it. Everything centres on Christ and his work. He is the watershed of the two ages, the climax of all history, especially salvation history.

¹ 1 Pet. 2:10 does not have the ‘now’ but it is clearly implied.

Introduction

In 2010, I published an expanded version of the paper I had given at the annual meeting of the Strict Baptist Historical Society, March 19th 2009, entitled *Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice and Its Aftermath*. As I said at the time, I hoped to produce a much fuller work on the subject. The years are passing, however, and still I am not ready to go to press with the finished manuscript – which, in any case, continues to grow. With this in mind, I have decided to proceed with the publication of what I thought would have formed an Appendix to the complete book – little did I realise how much *that* would grow!

As I have made clear in previous works, incipient hyper-Calvinism – leave alone hyper-Calvinism proper – continues to blight the standing command of Christ that we should ‘go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). And since Christ immediately added the solemn words – ‘he who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16) – it is essential that we make sure it really is the *gospel*, and not a mangled version of it, that we preach! Moreover, it is essential that we do indeed *preach* it to every creature. Hyper-Calvinism ruins gospel addresses to sinners – both in *what* is said to them, and *how* it is said. And this includes the doctrine of eternal justification. Hence my book.

In October 1875, in his monthly magazine, the *Sower*, Septimus Sears published the second part of a sermon he had preached in the Strict Baptist chapel, Clifton, Bedfordshire, under the title: ‘A Safe Hand for a Sinful Soul’. This publication immediately met with a storm of protest, a storm which had long-term consequences, consequences still with us today. In his sermon, Sears, trying to help those who were lost, wandering – or complacent – in the maze produced by the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification, told his congregation that no sinner is safe until he has trusted Christ for salvation; that is to say, until a sinner trusts Christ he is under the wrath of God. Sears, needless to say, should have gone further, and commanded, invited, urged his hearers to trust Christ at

Introduction

once. Sadly, he stopped short. Even so, for going as far as he did – telling his hearers (and readers) that, until they trusted Christ, they were not safe – he was vehemently attacked in the pages of the *Gospel Standard* and elsewhere, principally by John Gadsby. It was this attack which led to catastrophic additions to the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith in the late 1870s.

The question was this: Is it right to tell sinners who have not trusted Christ for salvation that they may consider themselves safe from the wrath of God, safe to die and enter eternity? No, said Sears. No sinner is safe until he trusts Christ. Gadsby, on the other hand, said certain sinners – sensible sinners – *are* safe, even though they have not trusted Christ.

The underlying issue was the doctrine of justification by faith. Gadsby, a determined advocate of the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification, argued that elect, sensible sinners are justified before faith, and therefore safe – and have been so from eternity. Indeed, they have never been under the wrath of God! Sears was convinced that until a sinner – elect or not – trusts Christ, he is anything but safe.

Although I have put it in the past tense, these issues are very much alive. For my part, I am most decidedly of Sears' opinion on this question. No sinner is safe until he has trusted Christ.

Of course, eternal justification did not start in the 1870s. But when, at that time, the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith were expanded, eternal justification played an important part in the formulation of those added Articles, and, even more important, it had a devastating effect on the way sinners are addressed with the gospel. From then on, massive limitations to such addresses became binding upon the Gospel Standard denomination, its ministers and its magazine.

In the intervening years, the doctrine and its consequences have spread even further. It is, at this very moment, being promulgated both in books and on the internet, and it may well come to play a significant role in the days to come. If so, and for a growing number, it will have a dreadful effect upon gospel addresses to sinners – with a terrifying consequence for the sinners themselves.

Let me illustrate the point. First, here is the relevant part of the Gospel Standard Articles:

Introduction

For ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them savingly to repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new-creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature-power, and, on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption... We believe that any such expressions as convey to the hearers the belief that they possess a certain power to flee to the Saviour, to close in with Christ, to receive Christ, while in an unregenerate state, so that unless they do thus close with Christ, *etc.*, they shall perish, are untrue, and must, therefore, be rejected.

Note the words. To tell men ‘that unless they... close with Christ... they shall perish’ is ‘untrue’. Is it? As I read my Bible – take John 3:15-18,36 as just one passage – I am convinced that until a sinner trusts Christ he is on the high road to damnation, and to tell any unbeliever that he is ‘safe’ is diabolical. I will make good my assertions.

And take these contemporary hyper-Calvinistic statements, posted on the internet in 2010. Do not miss the opening Sandemanian sentence,¹ followed by what is, as I will show, the inevitable consequence of eternal justification:

I’m not calling on you to believe in order to obtain or gain salvation. I’m calling on you to rest in the fact that Christ has redeemed and justified his elect by his perfect obedience and bloody sacrifice at Calvary as the sin-bearer. If you do rely on him and what he has accomplished, it evidences that you are one of God’s elect. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!... The main evidence of this state of lost-ness is unbelief of the gospel... The main evidence of salvation and justification is belief of the gospel... Were God’s elect ever condemned? Were God’s elect ever charged with their sin? Yes, but only as they were considered in their representative and surety, the Lord Jesus Christ.² This sentence of condemnation comes upon all men, all the sons of Adam without exception, even upon the elect of God themselves; though it is not executed upon them, but on their surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin was never charged to their persons individually apart from being considered in Christ... As we still look at condemnation, let’s look at John 3:18: ‘He that believes on him is not

¹ See the glossary. Note the call to believe (that is, assent to) facts. This is pure Sandemanianism.

² In this respect, at least, this marks a significant difference to the usual hyper-Calvinistic view.

Introduction

condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God'. We must also understand that our believing or not believing does not make us condemned or not condemned. Our believing or not believing only gives evidence of our being condemned or not condemned.

I hope these extracts, as they stand, set alarm bells ringing for all who are concerned with preaching the gospel to the unconverted as freely and fully as the New Testament warrants and demands. They should do. In this book, I will say why.

Such statements are not unique. Tobias Crisp's *Christ Alone Exalted*, with John Gill's notes, for instance, has been re-published. Crisp's work had a big influence on Gill. As for Gill himself, as Curt Daniel said:

Gill is probably the best representative of the position [eternal justification] not only because he is the most influential and pre-eminent hyper-Calvinist, but also because he writes as such length in defence of it. In his works on the subject, are found all the classical arguments.³

Take Crisp. While he says much that is excellent on the law, exalting the free grace of God in Christ – see my *Christ is All* – nevertheless, he does not mince his words when setting out the doctrine of eternal justification. He is its fervent advocate.⁴

And that does not by any means exhaust the growing body of material which propagates the doctrine of eternal justification. I have written this book, therefore, to examine the doctrine as carefully as I can, to expose its unbiblical nature, and to set out its disastrous effect on preaching the gospel to sinners. I do this in two sections: Principles, followed by Extracts with Comments. Even though I cannot help feeling my work loses something by not having the extracts at the proper place, separating them from the text, I hope, makes for easier reading. Alas, to my mind, it tends to

³ Daniel p307.

⁴ I put it into the present because, as I say, Crisp's work is in print; as are Gill's works, and John Brine's *A Defence of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification*. Both Gill and Brine may be found on the internet also. In addition, there are the works of Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

Introduction

diminish the force of what I want to say at the time of saying it. But there it is. May I ask, reader, that as you work your way through the following pages, you don't run away with the idea that I have grabbed what I assert out of thin air. Far from it. Where I have used the writings of others, I have documented my sources and given plenty of extracts; naturally enough, in section of the book with that heading! To help with this, I have noted the relevant page number for the extracts for each particular chapter. A book-mark left in that section should keep things flowing fairly smoothly.

In completing this volume, I give notice that I have not finished with the subject. In order to illustrate what I have said in this book, and to reinforce what I consider to be its vital message, I intend to produce what I will call a Case Study of that quarrel I spoke about – the 1870s attack upon the preaching of Septimus Sears – which led to eternal justification being a part of the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith.

But in this volume, as I say, I set out the main arguments hyper-Calvinists use to defend eternal justification. I then examine these arguments in the light of Scripture, and show that the doctrine is unbiblical. Finally, I look at the consequences for preaching the gospel to sinners.

Finally, I thank all who have helped me in any way in the writing of this book. I appreciate the time, effort and thought they have put into reading my work, and for all their perceptive comments, which have been stimulatingly instructive – even when I have not felt free to accept their suggestions. My friends have saved me from making more blunders than I have. Every mistake which remains is, of course, entirely my own.

The Principles

By [Christ] everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses

Acts 13:39

What Is Justification?

Justification is a declaration or pronouncement that someone is righteous; for example, in court after due trial (Deut. 25:1).¹ Such declarations are made in everyday life, also. For instance, when the tax collectors ‘justified God’ (Luke 7:29), they declared him righteous. Justification, I repeat, is a declaration. To ‘justify’ does *not* mean ‘to *make* righteous’. This is most important. Judges do not *make* defendants righteous or wicked – they *declare* them so (Deut. 25:1). The Spirit did not *make* Christ righteous – he *declared*, demonstrated him righteous (1 Tim. 3:16). The crowd did not *make* God righteous – they *declared* him righteous (Luke 7:29). Of course, if a human court could *make* the guilty righteous, it would be highly commended, to say the least – but that is an utter impossibility, and not what we are talking about. Likewise, condemnation – the opposite of justification – is a pronouncement or declaration. To condemn a man does not make him guilty; it declares him guilty.

But what about the gospel? What about justification in gospel terms? God, in the gospel, speaks of ‘justification’, and he speaks of it – he always speaks of it – in its forensic or legal sense, as a declaration. And, as in everyday life, justification in a gospel sense is the opposite of condemnation (2 Chron. 6:22-23; Prov. 17:15; John 5:24; Rom. 5:16,18; 8:1,33-34; *etc.*).

No human legal system can adequately illustrate every aspect of gospel justification, however. In fact, there are major dissimilarities – indeed, striking contradictions – between the two. In particular, in the gospel, God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). This is an utter impossibility in a human court (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15) – or ought to be! Remember, justification is a declaration. So, in the gospel, God declares the ungodly righteous! Now if a human court *declares* the blameworthy righteous, it is an abomination (Prov. 17:15; 24:24-25; Isa. 5:23; Matt. 27:4), as it is if men condemn the righteous (Ps. 94:21). Rational people want the courts to condemn the wicked, and justify the righteous, do they not (1 Kings 8:32)?

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p165.

The Principles

Well, then, God himself will not, cannot, justify the wicked under such a system (Ex. 23:6-7). Yet, in the gospel, he does justify the ungodly. Yes, he does! What is more, he does it justly (Rom. 3:26)!

That is to say, under certain circumstances, God, by his grace (Tit. 3:7), does justify sinners. In other words, he declares them righteous in his sight. He does this in a most remarkable way – but not by ignoring their sin and guilt, or by *making* them righteous. Let me say it again. In justifying sinners in the gospel, God declares them righteous – he does not make them so. Certainly not! *That* is one of the cardinal errors of Rome. Rome teaches that, in justification, God imparts righteousness to sinners, infusing it into them, making them righteous.² All sorts of dreadful consequences flow from this mistake.³

No. In justifying sinners, God graciously pronounces them righteous by *constituting* them righteous in union with or ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6:1-5; 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9). What does this mean? In his grace, God regards the sinner in question as united with Christ so that Christ’s obedience is reckoned to the sinner, imputed to the sinner – the sinner’s sin having been reckoned to the Saviour (Rom. 5:9,12-21; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:18). Imputation, putting to the account of, crediting with – like the deposit of credit in someone’s bank account, say – is one of the great principles of the gospel.

Leaving aside all illustration, just as Christ bore the sin and guilt of the sinner (Gal. 3:13) – all having been laid by God to Christ’s account – so the sinner is accounted righteous by God because God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. And all is brought about in the experience of the sinner by his believing, trusting God

² In short, Rome confuses and confounds justification and sanctification: ‘Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting’ (Council of Trent).

³ Although almost all versions translate Rom. 5:19 as ‘by one man’s obedience many will be *made* righteous’, this is not the best translation. ‘Constituted’ is far better: *kathistēmi*, ‘to set down as, constitute, to declare, show to be’ (Thayer).

What Is Justification?

in Christ for salvation. As he believes, as he trusts God in Christ, the sinner receives his justification. This is what the Bible means by being justified by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5; for instance). The sinner is accounted righteous because he is clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

I have just introduced two major topics – ‘the righteousness of Christ’ and ‘union with Christ’. I must pause to say a little more about each of them.

The righteousness of Christ

This phrase, or its equivalent, ‘Christ’s righteousness’, appears repeatedly in countless books, hymns, sermons, Confessions of Faith, *etc.*, yet, remarkably, ‘the righteousness of Christ’, as a phrase, never once appears in Scripture. As may be imagined, many have held strong opinions about this expression, what it means, and whether or not it is right to use it. Needless to say, nobody – among those I am talking about – questions the sinlessness of Christ; *that* is not the point at issue. Rather, what righteousness, precisely, does God account to his elect when they believe?

Here we come face to face with the much-debated topic of Christ’s so-called active and passive obedience. While I do not wish to open a lengthy discussion on this subject here – there is no shortage of material available for those who wish to pursue the matter and trace out all its ramifications – and while some object to the two words themselves, let me explain the terms: Christ’s *active* obedience is his entire life of obedience to the law; his *passive* obedience is his death on the cross under the curse of the law. I take ‘the righteousness of Christ’ to encompass both. Let me briefly say why.

The righteousness of Christ, that which is accounted to the believing sinner, is not Christ’s intrinsic righteousness. No! I am talking about Christ’s obedience to the law, culminating in his sacrifice on the cross, all of which was vindicated by his resurrection. Christ was born under the law (Gal. 4:4). Christ, in his life, was fully obedient to the commands of the law, and, in his death, suffered its penalty, curse and condemnation, and so established that righteousness which would justify the elect. God the Father demonstrated his total satisfaction – pleasure – in, by and

The Principles

with this completed work of his Son, and his full acceptance of it, by raising him from the dead, receiving him back in exaltation into glory, crowned in triumph (Ps. 24:7-10; Is. 52:13; 53:12; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Christ *himself* is the believer's righteousness (Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Pet. 1:1) – Christ and his work, his obedience to the law and his death under the law. Take Philippians 3:8-11. Paul, speaking passionately of his love of 'the righteousness which is from God by faith', explained: 'Righteousness... which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him [Christ]...'. This is what the apostle was referring to. It can be summed up in a word: Christ! Christ is the believer's righteousness.

Now there is no question but that the weight of Scripture comes down heavily on Christ's blood-sacrifice as God's justifying act (Rom. 3:24-26; 5:6,8-10; 6:1-10; 7:6; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:12-15,28; 10:1-14; 13:12; 1 Pet. 3:18; and scores of others). As Paul told us, this is at the heart of the Lord's supper: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes' (1 Cor. 11:26). Above all, we have the cardinal text: 'Through one man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life' (Rom. 5:18). That 'one righteous act' can only be Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the shedding of his blood. Scripture always lays massive emphasis on the death of Christ, under the curse of the law, as the justifying righteousness which God accounts to the believer.

But this does not mean that Christ's life of obedience under the law had no place in establishing this justifying righteousness. After all, justification is more than forgiveness, more than pardon; it is God accounting righteousness to the one to be justified. There is a negative aspect – the removal of sin, its guilt, condemnation and power, but there is also a positive aspect – the reckoning of righteousness. True, the penalty of the law was death, but the way of righteousness under the law was: 'Do and live' (Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11,13,21; Rom. 10:5); as Moses declared to the Israelites: 'It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us' (Deut. 6:25). For this very reason, Christ was

What Is Justification?

born under the law (Gal. 4:4). This means far more than that he was a Jew. He was, of course, but he was born under the law in order to obey it so that he might redeem his people (Gal. 4:5). And this he did perfectly, without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26), thus earning salvation for his people – his entire obedience culminating in the offering of himself a perfect, spotless sacrifice on the cross. The law's regulations fully typified this – the sacrificial beast had to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; and scores more) – and Christ, fulfilling the law in every aspect, was without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). His obedience under the law fitted him to be the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 5:9).

But there is more to it even than that. He became a man for the very purpose of living a life of obedience to the law, which culminated in the offering of his body on the cross. And he underwent all this in order to establish the righteousness that would justify his people. He became, therefore, the perfect Saviour for sinners for ever (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28).

So, although Scripture lays heavy stress on the death of Christ, the shedding of his blood in atoning sacrifice, as the justifying act, it also speaks of his obedience (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8-9; 10:5-14, 19-20). 'By one man's obedience many will be made [constituted] righteous' (Rom. 5:19). Without question, this obedience, as I said, culminated in his death (Matt. 26:39; John 10:18; Rom. 5:18-19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8; 10:10), for 'Christ... offered himself without spot' – 'without blemish' (NASB); 'unblemished' (NIV) – 'to God' (Heb. 9:14). Nevertheless, his entire existence as a man leading up to the cross is also a vital and integral part of this 'righteousness of Christ'. Hence:

Mary... will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20-21). The word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ... was born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law... (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the

The Principles

likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross... (Phil. 2:5-8). God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same [their humanity – NIV], that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15). When he came into the world, he said: ‘... a body you have prepared for me... “Behold, I have come... to do your will, O God”...’... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5-10).

When he was twelve, Jesus told his parents that he must be ‘about [his] Father’s business’ (Luke 2:49). And when he came to John to be baptised, he spoke of fulfilling ‘all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:15). While we must avoid speculation, we may surely say that, right from his baptism, the Lord Jesus was on that path of public obedience which would lead him inexorably to the cross. And in the years following his baptism, right up to his crucifixion, how often he spoke of the will of his Father, of his doing that will, of his finishing the work his Father had given him to do (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:4; 17:4), all culminating in his triumphant cry on the cross: ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30). Truly, as his Father’s ‘servant’ (Is. 42:1; 52:13), he kept his vow to him (Ps. 40:6–8; Heb. 10:5-9).

In short, I agree with Augustus Toplady:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and off’ring to bring;
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.⁴*

And with John Gill, citing William Ames:

The righteousness by which we are justified... is not to be sought for in different operations of Christ, but arises from his whole obedience, both active and passive; which is both satisfactory and meritorious, and

⁴ *Gospel Hymns* number 553.

What Is Justification?

frees from condemnation and death, and adjudges and entitles to eternal life; even as one and the same disobedience of Adam, stripped us of original righteousness, and rendered us obnoxious to condemnation.⁵

Mention of Adam reminds us that Christ is ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:45). The first Adam failed to obey God, and therefore died, bringing all men down with him. Christ, ‘the last Adam’, lived a life of perfect obedience to God his Father, and then offered that perfect life in sacrificial death to atone for the elect, thus uniting his active and passive obedience.

And, as I have said, Christ’s entire obedience of life unto death was completely vindicated by his resurrection:

Righteousness... shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:22-25; see also 1 Cor. 15:17; 2 Cor. 5:15). Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name... (Phil. 2:5-9).

In this way, Christ’s *entire* work in his obedient life, culminating in his atoning sacrifice, leading to his vindication by the resurrection, all combined to weave that robe of righteousness which justifyingly clothes the believer in the sight of God (Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4). Moreover, as the apostle declared – and note the double ‘much more’ – ‘much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life’ (Rom. 5:9-10).

Consider: ‘Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma’ (Eph. 5:2). Without doubt, the apostle is referring to the sacrificial death of Christ at Calvary. Now look at the context – both immediate and

⁵ Gill: *Body* Vol.2 p247.

The Principles

extended (Eph. 4:17 – 6:24). Once again, there is no question; the context is sanctification. Let me quote the verse *in full*: ‘And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma’. ‘Walk’ is a word of sanctification. The apostle is commanding believers to live a life of love, not only *because* Christ loved them and gave himself for them, but *as – even as, just as* – he loved them and gave himself for them. In light of the point I am making, this tells me that Christ’s obedience, while it was supremely his sacrificial *death*, also comprised his sacrificial *life*. In other words, ‘the righteousness of Christ’, which is accounted to the believer for justification, embraces Christ’s obedience – both in life and death.

Finally, while I am, myself, convinced that ‘the faith *of* Christ’ (Rom. 3:22,26; Gal. 2:16, twice; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9; all in the Greek) should be thought of as ‘faith *in* Christ’ (as NKJV, NIV, NASB – but see NASB margin in Rom. 3:26; Eph. 3:12), and not ‘the faith *of* Christ’ (AV – except Rom. 3:26), I realise that the point has been debated for centuries, and is still fervently contested today. If the ‘*of*’ is right – and, as I say, I am not persuaded it is – then perhaps ‘the faith of Christ’ could be thought of as ‘the faithfulness of Christ’. As such, it would lend even more weight to the claim for justification by Christ’s obedience in life, as well as his obedience in death.

Be that as it may, it is my conviction that Christ’s life of obedience, culminating in his sacrificial death, all under the law, constitutes the justifying righteousness for believers – ‘the righteousness of Christ’.

And when the sinner believes – trusts Christ – he receives this perfect righteousness of Christ. It is imputed to him. It is reckoned to him. It is credited to his account. He receives it at once. Upon his believing, he is absolutely justified. This righteousness, being Christ’s perfect and unchangeable and unchanging righteousness, never wanes, never alters. It is fixed, absolute, complete, and knows no variation. The perfect righteousness of Christ clothes the sinner, and the sinner, therefore, is for ever, from the instant he is justified, perfect beyond all condemnation in the sight of God. God sees no sin in the believer. I am not for a moment suggesting that the believer is sinless. I am not talking about sanctification! I am

What Is Justification?

concerned here with justification. I am not talking about the sinner's lifestyle, but his standing before God.⁶ As the sinner believes, he is at once and for ever free of condemnation, whoever might accuse him, and whatever offence they might accuse him of (Rom. 8:1,33-34). *Christ* is his righteousness!

Gill:

It is an individual act, done at once, and admits of no degrees; the sins of God's elect were altogether and at once laid on Christ, and satisfaction for them was made by him at once; he removed the iniquity of his people in one day, and by one sacrifice put away [their] sin for ever; all [their] sins were pardoned at once, upon this sacrifice offered, and satisfaction made; and the righteousness of Christ was accepted of, and imputed to his people, at once.⁷

Thus the gospel can truly be said to 'establish the law' (Rom. 3:31). All the law's commands were fully met by Christ. All the law's penalties were fully paid by Christ. All the Father's will was accomplished (John 19:30) by Christ who fulfilled the prophet's words: 'The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will exalt the law and make it honourable' (Isa. 42:21).

And this is what I mean by 'the righteousness of Christ'.

Now for the second of those two topics I mentioned.

Union with Christ

As we have seen, God, because of his grace, on the basis of his grace, justifies, declares righteous in his sight, all those sinners who trust the merits, the person and the work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, in the gospel, God does not merely declare the sinner righteous, arbitrarily, simply by decree. He certainly does

⁶ I am not saying, I hasten to add, that there is no connection between the two. Sanctification is an inevitable consequence of justification. See Eph. 2:8-10, for example. See also Col. 1:22-23. No sanctification? No justification (Heb. 12:14)!

⁷ Gill: *Body* Vol.2 pp251-252. Gill was saying this of God's decree and Christ's death. He changed his tune radically when he moved immediately to 'justification by faith', but I will leave that until we come to it. The point here is that, as Scripture makes plain, Gill's words (though he himself would have profoundly disagreed) apply to justification at the point of faith.

not declare the sinner righteous contrary to fact. If he did that, he would be breaking his own law. No. God declares the sinner righteous by taking steps to ensure that the sinner *is* righteous, constituting him righteous – not in himself, needless to say, but in Christ. That is, God reckons and regards the sinner as righteous as Christ – not in himself, but in Christ. He does this by putting the righteousness of Christ to the sinner's account.

How can this be? Union with Christ. That is the answer. Union with Christ. This, it goes without saying, is a breathtaking thought, far beyond our ability to grasp. So much so, if it had not been revealed to us by God, we should never have dreamed of it ourselves; we could never have dreamed of it. Having dealt with the matter at some length in other books,⁸ I will be brief.

'God... made [Christ] who knew no sin, to be sin [or a sin offering, NIV footnote] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5:20-21). By Christ's righteous act, 'by one man's obedience', God constitutes, declares many righteous (Rom. 5:17-19). But this speaks of more than God reckoning the sin of his elect to Christ, and reckoning Christ's righteousness to them. Rather, Christ and the elect are one (Rom. 6:1-11, for instance). 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him' (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Believers are 'in Christ'. This phrase is no makeweight: it appears nearly 250 times in the New Testament, so important is the concept.⁹ Nor am I forgetting the corresponding 'Christ in you' (John 17:23; Rom. 8:10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). To put it as plainly as I can: As Christ is to God, so are the believing elect.¹⁰ What Christ accomplished on their behalf, God declares to be fully theirs.

In short, in gospel justification by faith through union with Christ, we come up against something absolutely unique and astonishing. The sinner who is justified can say: 'Christ is mine, and I am his. We are one. All that he is to God, I am. All that he

⁸ See my *Particular; Infant; Baptist Sacramentalism*.

⁹ The GNB translates 'in Christ' as 'in union with Christ'. Excellent!

¹⁰ In saying this, I am most decidedly not going down the 'deification' route adopted by the Finnish/Orthodox school (see Beilby and Eddy). For Calvin's rebuttal of Osiander on this, see Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp40-51.

What Is Justification?

has, is mine. He took all my sin. By his righteousness, I am accounted righteous. God sees me only in and through his Son. As God the Father regards his Son, so he regards me'. It is amazing. Truly! No wonder the hymn-writers, in describing it, have used expressions such as 'amazing grace', 'I stand all amazed', 'the grace of God amazes me', 'grace – 'tis a charming sound', 'how free, how glorious is the grace', 'how wonderful the sovereign love', 'I am his, and he is mine', and so on. Amazing! This is the very word to use when thinking of God's plan for the justification of his elect through their union with Christ.

John Newton:

*Great God! From thee there's nought concealed,
Thou seest my inward frame;
To thee I always stand revealed
Exactly as I am!*

*Since I can hardly therefore bear
What in myself I see,
How vile and dark must I appear
Most holy God, to thee!*

*But since my Saviour stands between
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis he, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.*

*Thus, though a sinner, I am safe;
He pleads before the throne
His life and death in my behalf,
And calls my sins his own.*

*What wondrous love, what mysteries
In this appointment shine!
My breaches of the law are his,
And his obedience mine.¹¹*

The 1644 Particular Baptist Confession:

Those who have union with Christ are justified from all their sins, past, present and to come, by the blood of Christ; which justification we conceive to be a gracious and free acquittal of a guilty, sinful creature,

¹¹ *Gospel Hymns* number 202; *Gadsby's Hymns* number 119

The Principles

from all sin, by God, through the satisfaction that Christ has made by his death; and this applied in the manifestation¹² of it through faith.¹³

The Westminster documents:

The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling... Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteousness in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.¹⁴

So much for the second topic. The believing sinner is accounted righteous because he is 'in Christ', and, therefore, all Christ's obedience is reckoned his. He is forever beyond condemnation, clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Now let me make a vital point: *this must not be weakened, allowed to shrivel*. Justification is a legal declaration, yes, but the New Testament could not be more explicit about the believer's actual standing, his real standing, before God:

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

For he made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water¹⁵ by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or

¹² 'Manifestation' will figure heavily in what follows. Read it as 'display, revelation, exhibition, appearance, materialisation, something obvious, visible, apparent, brought to light, observed or discerned'. I am convinced the 1644 Particular Baptists, by 'justification... [is] applied in the manifestation of it through faith', meant that the sinner receives his actual justification in experience through faith. Note the 'applied'. Hyper-Calvinists, however, use 'manifestation' in a very different way, as I will explain.

¹³ Lumpkin p164.

¹⁴ *Westminster* pp160-161,163.

¹⁵ This does not refer to water baptism. See my *Baptist Sacramentalism* (this applies to all similar notes below).

What Is Justification?

wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27). For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

These statements must be allowed to speak with their full voice. They must not be muted, or mentally postponed to eternity to come. Every believer, the moment he believes, is perfectly righteous in God's sight, made so, constituted so, appointed so, declared so, by God washing away all his sin in the blood of his Son, and clothing him with his Son's perfect righteousness. From that moment on, and for ever, God sees no sin whatsoever in his saints, viewing them as he does, in and through Christ. *This* is the biblical doctrine of justification.

Let me say it again: this is a vital point. Reader, I urge you, do not press on until it has sunk in. If I am a believer, I am one with Christ, and God sees me as perfect as his Son. This is what justification by faith means.

We are now ready to take this 'justification' a step further. And that, in itself, is one of the wonders of the gospel. We can explore justification even further, much further. Eternity will not exhaust the exploration!

So important is this next step, I think it best if we give it a chapter of its own in order to give it due consideration. We shall start by looking at a series of biblical statements on justification which, at first glance, seem to bear elements of in-built contradiction.

Whom [God] foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified

Romans 8:29-30

The Four Aspects of Justification

In the New Testament, we find statements about justification which, at first glance, may appear difficult to reconcile.¹ We have met some of these already. For instance: ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God’ (Rom. 5:1). Justification by faith. And yet, a few verses later the apostle declares: ‘Having now been justified by [Christ’s] blood’ (Rom. 5:9). Justification by the blood of Christ. Yet again, in the closing verse of the previous chapter, the apostle states that Christ ‘was raised for our justification’ (Rom. 4:25). Justification in the resurrection of Christ. And, going back to Romans 5:9, what Paul goes on to say is: ‘Much more then, having now been justified by [Christ’s] blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him’ (Rom. 5:9). Believers are ‘eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm [them] to the end, that [they] may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:7-8); that is, justification at the final judgement. And, of course, at the root of it all, we have God’s eternal decree to justify his elect through Christ.

As the epigraph for this chapter puts it: ‘Whom [God] foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified’ (Rom. 8:29-30).

Now, how can a sinner be justified in eternity past, justified in the death and resurrection of Christ, justified by faith, and yet be justified in eternity to come? We must not dismiss this question as trying to be clever with words. Whenever we come across a difficulty in Scripture, there is always a gem underneath. In this case, the stronger our grip on this fourfold view of justification, the greater will be our appreciation of its richness. Moreover, a biblical stance on the four aspects of justification will keep us from the error of ‘eternal justification’. No mean benefits!

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p175.

Before I develop the point, let me digress for a moment or two. Taking this element of ‘seeming contradiction’ about these statements concerning justification, I want to latch onto the notion of ‘contradiction’. Since ‘contradiction’ will play an important part in later discussion, let me say just a few words on it now.

The seeming contradiction

I include the definite article because, here, once again, we meet our old friend ‘the seeming contradiction’, ‘the paradox’, ‘the antinomy’ of the gospel. That venerable gentleman keeps turning up, does he not? Of course he does! Like the poor, he is ever with us. As long as we are in this fallen world, we shall never be able fully to understand all God’s revelation, let alone explain it all and in all its ramifications. Yes, it is our duty and privilege to try to grasp as much of God’s truth as we can, and to explore it with all the zeal, care and grace God gives us, to ‘enquire and search carefully’ (see 1 Pet. 1:10), but we shall always end up where we cannot fully comprehend, cannot answer every question, cannot take it any further; that is, we shall meet with one ‘seeming contradiction’ after another. It is inevitable.

Well, how should we greet our old friend? I have fully gone into this matter elsewhere,² so I will not repeat myself here, except to say that the right way to treat any biblical paradox – formed by two seemingly contradictory statements drawn from Scripture – is to hold both in tension. Just like railway lines,³ we must let them stay parallel. We must not, whatever we do, try by human ingenuity to fuse them into one. Above all, we must not get round the seeming contradiction by getting rid of one aspect of the paradox to leave the other to stand alone in all its pristine glory. Continuing with the railway illustration – we would be mad to get rid of one of the rails! Such a railway might be remarkably logical, but it would be singularly fatal to travel on. Yet, scoring a blue pencil through one aspect of the paradox is the very thing many do in order to preserve their all-encompassing demand for logical consistency.

Such well-intentioned people are misguided. Logic is not the idol to which every argument must bow the knee and conform. God

² See my *Offer; Particular*.

³ I am talking of traditional railways, of course.

The Four Aspects of Justification

does not demand it of us. I am not aware of any command: ‘Above all things, never be illogical’! We are not to try to be wiser than God. Whatever God has revealed in his word, we must maintain – even at the cost of human logic. We must not devise schemes which warp God’s revelation in order to preserve our logical purity, or to fend off accusations of Arminianism or antinomianism or whatever. The fact is, if we do leave ourselves open to the sort of abuse the apostle faced (Rom. 3:4-8; 6:1-2), it is an indication that we are maintaining Scripture in its proper balance! The right course in all these things is to declare what Scripture says, and leave God to look after his truth. Just as God did not need Uzza’s hand to steady the ark (1 Chron. 13:9-10), neither does he need us to protect his gospel from the accusation of logical inconsistency. Peter’s dogmatic endorsement of Paul, and his categorical dismissal of those who, in his day, tried their ‘adjustments’ on his fellow-apostle’s writings, bears repeating. At this juncture, it is most apposite: ‘Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his letters... in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures’ (2 Pet. 3:15-16). We must not do it!

One final illustration from the railway: On a long straight stretch of track, the rails do meet – in the infinite distance. All seeming contradictions will be resolved in eternity!

There it is. Getting back to the main theme, however: the New Testament speaks of justification in four aspects.⁴ God, because of his grace, on the basis of his grace, justifies, declares righteous, all those sinners who trust the merits, the person and the work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Such sinners are one with Christ. He bore all their sin. They bear all his righteousness. God in Christ decreed it all in eternity, accomplished it on the cross and in the resurrection, and by his Spirit applies it to the elect sinner at the point of faith. And, finally, it can be properly said that all the elect

⁴ References, other than the ones I have given, could include Rom. 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 8:18; 1 Cor. 1:18; Eph. 2:5,8; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 2:11-14; 3:5; Heb. 10:39; 1 Pet. 1:5,9; 2:24; 4:13; 5:1.

The Principles

will be ultimately justified when Christ returns. No passage, perhaps, captures all this better than the first chapter of Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:3-14, NIV).

All of it was purposed in eternity past. All of it was accomplished by Christ. All of it is experienced in time, here and now. But all of it will come to final and complete fulfilment – 'be put into effect' – in eternity to come. All four statements are true and consistent with each other. In terms of human logic, they may seem inconsistent. Yet, in terms of biblical revelation, it all makes perfect sense – as long as we allow each statement to bear the weight God has given it in Scripture, and do not warp any aspect of any statement to make it all fit together with our pre-conceived ideas of logical consistency, in order to preserve our theological system.

Gathering this together, we may say that justification is to be considered in four respects. Although we have to be careful when introducing adjectives, let me set it out as simply as I can. First, we have *decreed* or *determined* justification. Secondly, we have *accomplished* justification. Thirdly, we have *applied* or *actual* justification. And fourthly, we have *absolute* or *final* justification. Let me explain.

The Four Aspects of Justification

By *decreed* or *determined* justification, I mean that God the Father, in eternity past, decreed or determined to justify his elect through union with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection.

By *accomplished* justification, I mean that Christ, when he died and rose again, accomplished the justification of all for whom he died, all the elect in him.

By *applied* or *actual* justification, I mean that when the elect are brought to faith by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, they come into the actual experience and benefit of their justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

By *absolute* or *final* justification, I mean that, at the last judgement, God will totally vindicate his elect, and they will for, all eternity, be entirely free from sin in all its aspects.⁵

Do not miss the trinitarian nature of all this. Do not miss that it is all ‘in Christ’. God justifies sinners by virtue of the union between Christ and his elect. The elect are justified in eternity past – decreed justification. They are justified at the cross and in Christ’s resurrection – accomplished justification. And they are justified in their experience – applied, actual or experimental justification at regeneration and faith; that is, conversion. And they will be finally and absolutely justified in eternity to come. And all is ‘in Christ’.

In particular, for my purposes in this book, the sinner is *actually* justified as the Holy Spirit convicts him, regenerates him, and brings him to faith and repentance and so joins him to Christ, unites him to Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:13).⁶ For it is as he believes, and only as he believes, that the sinner is actually ‘in Christ’, and Christ is in the sinner. And it is then that he is actually justified.

⁵ One of my mss. readers told me a story by way of illustration. A man was asked: ‘Are you saved?’ ‘Do you mean’, said he, ‘have I been saved, am I being saved, or shall I be saved?’ He could have opened with: ‘Was I saved in God’s decree?’

⁶ Gal. 3:26-27 does *not* refer to water baptism, but regeneration – which leads to faith.

The Principles

*And here we have reached the precise heart of the matter. **This** is what we are talking about.*

Justification. Justification by faith. *Actual* justification by faith. God, because of his grace, on the basis of his grace, justifies, declares righteous, all those sinners who trust the merits, the person and the work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Such sinners are one with Christ. He bore all their sin. They bear all his righteousness. God the Father decreed it all in eternity; in Christ, he accomplished it on the cross and in the resurrection; in eternity to come, God will vindicate his elect as justified. But – and this is the essence of the quarrel with ‘eternal justification’, and my reason for writing this book – God only actually justifies his elect when by his Spirit he applies the work of Christ to them at the point of faith. Leaving aside the final justification – over which I can see no quarrel – we may say that while the elect sinner is eternally justified in God’s decree, and justified by union with Christ in his death and resurrection, *he is not **actually** justified until he comes to saving faith in Christ.*

As the Westminster documents put it:

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.⁷

This is worth repeating: The elect ‘are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does... actually apply Christ unto them’; that is, until they exercise saving faith. This is what the Scriptures clearly assert: ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand’ (Rom. 5:1-2). Until the elect are regenerated and come to faith, they are not actually justified, they are not at peace with God.

I must stress this yet again. An undoubted truth it is, that before they come to faith – indeed, before they are even born into this world – the elect *are* justified in God’s decree in eternity. Yes. Furthermore, before they come to faith – indeed, before they are

⁷ *Westminster* p59.

The Four Aspects of Justification

even born into this world – the elect *were (are)* representatively justified in union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Yes. *But before they come to faith, the elect **are not actually** justified. They are only **actually** justified as and when they believe.*⁸

Now this is precisely where the hyper-Calvinists go astray. How? They place the word ‘actual’ not where it belongs biblically, at the point of faith, but in eternity with the decree of God; hence ‘eternal justification’. In short, they argue that the elect are actually justified in eternity.

At first glance, I admit, this may seem a spat about words, but it certainly is far more than that! The consequences of the word-order here are massive, as I will make clear. But the issue at this stage in the debate is this: instead of doing what Scripture does, and placing the word ‘actual’ at the point of faith, hyper-Calvinists place it at the point of God’s decree in eternity.

Why do they do it? Why do they shift the word ‘actual’? Fundamentally, they do it because of the priority (to them) of their theological system, and their consequent obsession with fitting every passage of Scripture into that system, leaving no loose ends, no unresolved paradoxes. More immediately, they do it because, in justification, they want to protect God’s sovereignty, the freeness of his grace to the exclusion of the sinner’s works, and the certainty of accomplishment of Christ’s redemptive work. They further wish to give assurance to those who doubt their justification. These ‘more immediate’ motives are excellent, motives for which I have nothing but praise, but... whatever the motive, however good the motive, it is always – always – wrong to tinker with Scripture. In this case: motive, excellent; method, bad.

Besides, they have no need to worry. God can protect his doctrine without our interference. Moreover, such interference always leads to error. It does here. The upshot is that hyper-Calvinists end up *opposing* the biblical doctrine of ‘justification by faith’.⁹ This is how serious it is.

⁸ The elect who lived before Christ were justified by anticipatory faith in him.

⁹ I am not being pejorative. I am well aware that hyper-Calvinists use the phrase – except, significantly, in the Gospel Standard Articles – but I will

The Principles

So much so, we need to look closely into the way hyper-Calvinists warp the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, and move actual justification from its biblical location – at the point of faith – to fix it back in eternity. We shall have to begin by seeing precisely what is meant by ‘eternal justification’, and how hyper-Calvinists try to argue it. And that takes us on to the next chapter.

give my reasons for asserting that what they understand by ‘justification by faith’ is very different to the biblical meaning. Moreover, as I will show, this leads directly to my subtitle: ‘Gospel Preaching to Sinners Marred by Hyper-Calvinism’.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ

Galatians 2:16

What Is Eternal Justification?

Scripture speaks unequivocally. Faith precedes justification in the sinner's experience, and faith leads to actual justification.¹ This, it goes without saying, does not mean justification by works! While faith is a duty,² it is not a work! According to hyper-Calvinists, however, this kind of talk does lead to justification by works. To fend off this rightful dread of works in connection with justification, they argue that the elect sinner is actually justified in eternity. It follows, therefore, that actual justification precedes faith in the sinner's experience. In fact, according to hyper-Calvinists, it is justification that leads to faith. They are wrong. Justification does not lead to faith; faith brings justification. If they had been talking about *election* and faith, they could not have been more right. But since they are talking about *justification* and faith, they are grievously mistaken. While election *is* actual in eternity, justification is not. Hyper-Calvinists confuse election and justification. They conflate the two. Let me elucidate.

Hyper-Calvinists confuse election and justification

Listen to Gill. I do not think he could be more explicit in showing his confusion – not to say, conflation – of election and justification, and the immediate consequence of it:

Justification is an act of God's grace, flowing from his sovereign will and pleasure; the elect of God are justified by his grace... freely... (Tit. 3:7; Rom. 3:24)... As God's will to elect is the election of his people, so his will to justify them is the justification of them... The reason why [the elect] have faith is because they are justified.

To those who argued against eternal justification, on the grounds 'that men cannot be justified before they exist', Gill replied:

This objection lies as strongly against eternal election as against eternal justification... As God's decree and will to elect to everlasting life and salvation is his election of them... so his decree or will to justify them

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p177.

² See my *Offer*.

The Principles

is the justification of them... [It is] an immanent act in God [that is, entirely within God himself]... as election.³

What did Gill mean? He made his position clear:

Faith is not the cause but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified, is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified... Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it... Faith is the sense, perception and evidence of our justification.⁴

Again:

Justification is an act of God's gracious will conceived in his mind from eternity, by which he wills not to impute sin to his people, but to Christ their surety; and that they should be accounted righteous through the righteousness of his Son; in which act of his will, the whole essence of justification in his sight lies; this was pronounced on Christ, as their head and representative, at his resurrection, when he, as such, was justified, acquitted and discharged, and they in him.⁵

Here we have Gill's position. Exactly as with election, so with justification. God has decreed to justify his elect, and that decree, that will, is the whole essence of justification. God's will to justify his elect is their justification. So said Gill.

The important words are 'the whole essence'. Now, if – as Gill alleged – 'the whole essence of justification' does lie in God's will to justify his elect – several huge consequences follow, consequences which pervert the gospel.⁶ Let me give but two of them in passing. If God's will constitutes the *whole* essence of justification – that is, God's will to justify *is* justification – why did Christ have to die? If I may borrow the apostle's words: 'Christ

³ Gill: *Body* Vol.1 pp298-299,302-304.

⁴ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp197,199,211,213; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,67. See also Gill's note in *Crisp* Vol.1 pp91-92. Note 'manifestation' once again, and Gill's hyper-Calvinistic use of the word.

⁵ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p671.

⁶ Compare Murray: *Redemption* p121. See Berkouwer pp157,162.

What Is Eternal Justification?

died for nothing!’ (Gal. 2:21, NIV). And if God’s will is the *whole* essence of justification, why do sinners have to believe?⁷

Let me illustrate that last point. It was clearly God’s eternal will that I should be male. My believing, or otherwise, had nothing whatsoever to do with it. It was God’s will. According to the hyper-Calvinist, this is how it is with justification. If the elect are justified in eternity, before faith, then faith can have nothing to do with their justification.

Let us get to grips with Gill’s assertions. I want to start by saying where I agree with him. Faith is not the cause of justification. Of course not! I have never suggested it. Nor has anybody else engaged in this debate. So far, so good. But now our ways part.

Gill confused election and justification. Worse, he conflated them. According to Gill, election and justification are virtually synonymous. Take his answer to the objection ‘that men cannot be justified before they exist’. Nothing could more clearly display his conflating of election and justification: ‘This objection lies as strongly against eternal election as against eternal justification... As God’s decree and will to elect to everlasting life and salvation is his election of them... so his decree or will to justify them is the justification of them... as election’.

This is quite wrong. Of course men can be elect before they exist. Of course? It is *essential* that they are elect before they exist! That is the kernel of election. The elect are actually elect before time; they are elect in eternity. But when Gill said the same applies to justification, he was making it as plain as noon-day that he melded election and justification into one, and was convinced that the elect are not only *actually* elect in eternity, but *actually* justified as well, at the same ‘time’, in eternity. They are not!

Again, he was seriously mistaken when he asserted: ‘The reason why [the elect] have faith is because they are *justified*’. Not at all! The reason why [the elect] come to faith is because they are *elect*. According to Scripture, I say, we have faith because we are elect – not because we are justified. Where, in Scripture, are we told that we have faith because we are justified? Nowhere that I know of.

⁷ Crisp and Gill never faced up to this dilemma (Daniel pp327-328). I have not finished with this point, nor with these extracts.

The Principles

Yet we are plainly taught that election is the cause of the sinner's faith and gospel obedience, and that the sinner's faith and gospel obedience are the consequence and evidence of God's electing decree.⁸ As the apostle said to the Thessalonians:

We give thanks to God always for you all... remembering... your work of faith... knowing, beloved brothers, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance... and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all... who believe... Your faith towards God has gone out [everywhere, NIV], so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare... what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:2-10).

How did Paul know the Thessalonians were elect? By the effect of the gospel in their lives; that is to say, because they had come to saving faith and gospel obedience; in repentance they had turned from idols to God; and so on. Why? Why had they so turned? Because they were elect, of course! 'Knowing, beloved brothers, your election by God. For...'. In particular, as the apostle stated, the Thessalonians' faith was an indelible evidence of their election; not their justification. He certainly did not say it proved and demonstrated their eternal justification! It was, therefore, God's election of them that led to their believing. Now the Thessalonians were not unique. It is the same for all believers. Every believer is a believer because God elected him. Election leads to faith! *But the apostle never once said that **justification** leads to faith.* Never! Election leads to faith, yes. Justification leads to faith? Never! Impossible!

As Gill himself observed, speaking of the Thessalonians:

The knowledge that the apostle and his companions had of the election of the members of this church [was] not by inspiration of the Spirit of God, but by the manner of the gospel's coming unto them, and the

⁸ See John 6:37; 10:16,26-29; Acts 2:33; 3:16; 5:31; 11:18; 13:48; 1 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 4:6-7; Eph. 2:8,10,13; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:2; 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:1,3; for instance.

What Is Eternal Justification?

effects it had upon them... and from their faith, hope and love mentioned in the previous verse.⁹

Quite! Election, not justification, is the cause of faith. Election leads to faith which, in turn, leads to actual justification. Faith is the *effect* and *evidence* of **election**, but the *means* of **justification**. I am not splitting hairs. It is election – not justification – that leads to faith. At God's appointed time (Gal. 1:15), the elect sinner is regenerated and brought to saving faith and repentance. There is no question of it. God, in eternity, in his everlasting grace and love, elected each of his elect as a particular sinner to be regenerated, converted, to come to faith and repentance, and he fixed, determined and decreed the time and place of it (Rom. 8:28-30; 9:6-29; Gal. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:9). That is why that chosen sinner will be regenerated and will come to faith. In eternity past, in God's decree, he was elected to it, he was predestined to it. Regeneration leading to repentance and faith are the fruits and effects of God's election. *And so is justification*. Election causes regeneration, which leads to repentance and faith, which brings justification. **Justification** is not the cause of faith; **election** is. The apostle told us that God is 'the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26). He did not say that 'the one whom God has justified will have faith in Jesus'.

So let us come to this 'eternal justification'. For a start, it is worth reminding ourselves that 'eternal justification' is not a biblical term. This, in itself, however, does not mean it is improper – as long as the idea is scriptural. But is it? *That* is the question.

As I have explained, there is an eternal aspect to justification. Aspect? That's when it all began! Of that there is no doubt whatsoever; without God's decree, there would be no justification. Let me repeat myself, and stress the point as strongly as I can: *There is an eternal aspect to justification... Of that there is no doubt whatsoever; without God's decree, there would be no justification*. Nothing I write here – or anywhere else – detracts from this in the slightest.

I further explained that while the elect sinner is eternally justified in God's decree, and justified by union with Christ in his

⁹ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p542.

The Principles

death and resurrection, he is not *actually* justified until, by God's grace, through the sovereign Spirit, he personally repents and believes. In God's electing purpose the elect are eternally justified, yes, but in actual experience, they are justified only when they believe.

However illogical it may seem, we must always allow Scripture to speak in its own way, even though men dismiss it as inconsistent. We must do it here. Although the elect *are* justified in God's purpose in eternity, and justified in Christ on the cross and in his resurrection, they are not *actually* justified until they believe. Indeed, the elect – although justified in God's decree in eternity, representatively justified in Christ's death and resurrection, and actually justified on their coming to faith – will not be finally justified until the return of Christ.

But...

This is where the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification makes its presence felt. Not only did God *elect* his people in eternity, he *actually justified* them in eternity. So hyper-Calvinists say. Those who hold to this eternal justification reject the argument I have set out. Not only do they not believe it, they resolutely oppose it. It gets worse. Above all, they regard it as horrific, destructive of the gospel. They could not be more wrong. The boot is firmly on the other foot.

Eternal justification. Reader, this expression may be new to you. Even so, it is extremely likely that you have met it already – yet been blissfully unaware of the fact! How about this verse from John Kent's hymn: 'Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding'? Have you ever sung it? I am pretty sure you have. It is, after all, found in many collections of every hue,¹⁰ and, if the tune is right, in my experience, is sung lustily by the staunchest Arminian. Yet, as it stands, it is more than capable of being read as pure hyper-Calvinism:

¹⁰ *Gospel Hymns* number 523; *Old Christian Hymns* number 501; *New Christian Hymns* number 504; *Praise!* number 671; *Grace Hymns* number 384; *Hymns of Faith* number 51; and, it goes without saying, *Gadsby's Hymns* number 766.

What Is Eternal Justification?

*Heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus,
Long ere time its race begun;
To his name eternal praises;
Oh, what wonders he has done!
One with Jesus,
One with Jesus,
By eternal union one.*

This, I say, as it stands, is hyper-Calvinism, teaching eternal union with Christ, and, therefore, the actual eternal justification of the elect. I admit, as long as the singer interprets Kent's words in a way which I am almost certain he did not intend, and confines this eternal union to *God's decree*, all is well. But...

In fact, the hyper-Calvinist means it! The hyper-Calvinist thinks that the elect are not only justified in eternity in God's decree, not only justified by union with Christ on the cross and in his resurrection, but that they are *actually* justified in Christ in eternity past; in truth, that they always have been justified. They are already justified when they were born. In fact, they are justified from before the beginning of time. The elect have never been unjustified. In particular, for my purposes in this book, the elect are justified before they believe.

Let me repeat that. It is so startling. You must not miss it. According to the hyper-Calvinist, *the elect are justified before they believe*.

Hmm.

A question naturally suggests itself. If this doctrine of eternal justification is true, then what is this 'justification by faith' we meet in Scripture? And we do read of it in Scripture, do we not? Of course we do! How about Acts 13:39; Romans 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Galatians 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5, for a start? What do these scriptures mean by linking justification and faith so strongly? According to Scripture, when a sinner believes, he *receives* his justification.

What does the hyper-Calvinist understand by 'justification by faith'? How does he interpret these verses? There is no doubt. It can

The Principles

be plainly seen in the extracts from Gill with which I opened this chapter. Scan them again, reader, and see if you can spot it.¹¹

Let me spell it out. I am not putting words in anybody's mouth. The extracts throughout this book bear out that this is the sort of thing a hyper-Calvinist would say:

Justification by faith is biblical, yes; that's a truism. But it does not mean that until an elect sinner believes he is unjustified, and that he is actually justified only upon his believing. Oh, no. Not at all. The elect sinner was and is actually justified in eternity. He is actually justified before he believes. Justification by faith means that, at God's appointed time, the elect sinner comes, by faith, to *realise* that he is justified and has always been justified, justified before he was born. Above all, that he has been justified from eternity past. By faith, all this is 'manifested' to him. *This* is what justification by faith means.

Thus the hyper-Calvinist argues.

The difference between the biblical doctrine of justification (and justifying faith), and the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of justification (and justifying faith), is enormous. Talk about a great gulf fixed! It boils down to the difference between 'receive' and 'realise'. According to Scripture, when a sinner believes, he *is* justified; according to the hyper-Calvinist, when a sinner believes, he *realises* he has been justified from eternity. Or, putting it another way, on both systems – the biblical and the hyper-Calvinistic – when a sinner believes, he receives something. What does he receive? Justification? or the assurance that he is already justified? As I say, the difference between the two is massive. And the consequences of the differences are likewise large and far-reaching. And this is what I want to explore and expose. Let me set out the two doctrines side by side.

First, the biblical doctrine:

The elect sinner is justified in eternity in God's decree. He is justified in union with Christ in the Saviour's death and resurrection. But he is only actually justified when, by God's grace, through the sovereign Holy Spirit, he actually repents and believes. As he believes, he receives his justification, he is actually

¹¹ 'Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it'.

justified. This is what the Scriptures mean by ‘justification by faith’.

Now the hyper-Calvinist doctrine:

The elect sinner is actually justified in eternity in God’s decree, and actually justified in union with Christ in the Saviour’s death and resurrection. By God’s grace, through the sovereign Holy Spirit, the elect sinner comes to realise and receive this truth about himself; it is manifested to him that he is one of the elect and has been justified from eternity. As he believes this truth, he receives the comfort of the fact that he has been eternally justified. This is what the Scriptures mean by ‘justification by faith’.

Let me be blunt: the doctrine of eternal justification is grossly unbiblical. It flies diametrically in the face of Scripture. And it has huge consequences, disastrous consequences. I have already mentioned one or two. Let me take up another. I return to an extract from Gill, one which I have already quoted. Justification, he declared:

Is an individual act, done at once, and admits of no degrees; the sins of God’s elect were altogether and at once laid on Christ, and satisfaction for them was made by him at once; he removed the iniquity of his people in one day, and by one sacrifice put away [their] sin for ever; all [their] sins were pardoned at once, upon this sacrifice offered, and satisfaction made; and the righteousness of Christ was accepted of, and imputed to, his people at once.¹²

This was my note at the time:

Gill, of course, was saying this of God’s decree and Christ’s death. He changed his tune radically when he moved immediately to ‘justification by faith’, but I will leave that until we come to it. The point here is this, as Scripture makes plain, Gill’s words (though he himself would have profoundly disagreed) are as much applicable to justification at the point of faith as they are at the point of God’s decree and Christ’s redeeming work.

That is what I said; this is the place to return to it. Having said what he said, Gill moved on immediately to this:

¹² Gill: *Body* Vol.2 pp251-252.

The Principles

The sense of justification admits of degrees... The manifestations of it are various and different, at different times... but justification as an act of God, is but one, and done at once, and admits of no degrees.¹³

Let me unpack this. Gill was saying that justification is complete, it is finished, it is accomplished in every respect at the point of God's decree and Christ's work. 'Justification by faith' is the believer's sense of his personal interest in this finished work. God manifests the justification to the elect sinner in time. It is not that the sinner is justified by faith in time – he is justified before time, before faith, in eternity – but, in time, by faith, he receives the manifestation of this fact.

This is exceedingly serious. In the hyper-Calvinistic system, 'justification by faith', far from being the biblical experience of a sinner being absolutely righteous and free of condemnation the moment he trusts the Redeemer, is now reduced to a manifestation, a feeling which can ebb and flow. While I agree that the believer's *sense* of his justification may vary, his justification *itself* cannot vary. But Gill – because of his doctrine of eternal justification and his view that 'justification by faith' is a manifestation of his eternal justification – had boxed himself into a corner. By his doctrine, '*justification by faith*' *itself* is unstable. Worse, he had set out a view which would lead thousands into a dreadful place. The consequences of that will be fully known only in eternity.

'Justification by faith' is not a manifestation that I have been eternally justified; in other words, it is not that I am given 'the manifestation of an eternal secret'.¹⁴ Not at all. Before a sinner believes, he is unjustified. It is only as he believes that he receives the righteousness of Christ, and is justified. This is 'justification by faith'! There is a 'before' and an 'after' in his experience. He has been 'converted'.

Now, conversion is not the change produced when a justified unbeliever is turned into a justified believer. Nor is it when a sinner comes out of a state of ignorance about the fact that he is justified, and comes to realise that he has always been justified, even from eternity past. *That* is not conversion! Conversion is the radical

¹³ Gill: *Body* Vol.2 p252.

¹⁴ Robert Seymour in Daniel p335.

What Is Eternal Justification?

change of heart and life – in status before God and condition before men¹⁵ – which comes about through the sinner's regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which leads to repentance and faith. And before faith, this sinner, this elect sinner, was unjustified. At and after faith, this believing sinner is now justified.

Let me prove it. Consider 1 Corinthians 6:11.

1 Corinthians 6:11

Listing those who 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' – fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners – Paul says:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Note the repeated 'but'. Paul is here contrasting believers with unbelievers. More precisely, he is contrasting the Corinthian believers *after* their conversion with what they were as unbelievers *before* their conversion. Paul's emphasis is shown in his threefold use of 'but'. Until their conversion, until they came to faith, they were... what? They were unwashed, unsanctified, unjustified. But ... but... but... having come to faith, they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified. In particular, before conversion, they were unjustified; after conversion, they were justified.

Paul, of course, could not possibly have said *that* if he had believed in eternal justification. On that doctrine, the Corinthians would have always been washed, sanctified and justified. They would have been washed, sanctified and justified from eternity. The apostle, on that basis, would have said something like: 'You had always been washed, sanctified and justified – the truth is, you were washed, sanctified and justified in eternity – but you came to realise that it was so when it was manifested to you'. *But he said nothing of the sort.* It never entered his mind. The context is plain. He said they had been unwashed, had been unsanctified and had been unjustified, but at conversion they were washed, they were sanctified, and they were justified.

¹⁵ I will have more to say on 'status' and 'condition'.

The Principles

So, what did Gill think of this? George M.Ella said Gill noted the absence of ‘now’ in the Greek, and so, he claimed, the kind of argument I have put forward is ‘irrelevant’.¹⁶ End of story!

Oh?

Let me say at once that Gill and Ella were quite right about the Greek. As you will have noticed, reader, in both the NKJV and AV, the ‘now’ does not appear. From a purely literal linguistic point of view, this is quite right. The ‘now’ is not in the Greek. But that is not all there is to be said about it – not by a long chalk. Gill’s deduction was simplistic. In fact, he missed the entire sense and force of the context. His talk of ‘irrelevant’ was the real irrelevance!

In the first place, the argument does not require the ‘now’. I haven’t used it. But the fact is, before faith, the Corinthians were not justified, and after faith they were.

Moreover, it is legitimate to set it out in the present tense, the time of the apostle’s writing to them: Before conversion, they were unwashed, they were unsanctified, and they were unjustified, but now they are washed, now they are sanctified, and now they are justified. I admit the ‘now’ has to be supplied – but it is clearly understood. The ‘now’ is every bit as much in the verse as if the apostle had used the word. It should be supplied. I am not just asserting it. The context, I say, demands it. What is more, *its absence actually makes the point more strongly*. No, I am not whistling in the dark! The lack of the ‘now’ actually makes the apostle’s point more strongly.

Take a parallel case: ‘The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17).¹⁷ The ‘but’ has been added – but rightly so. In any case, leaving it out only serves to make the point even stronger: ‘The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’. Leaving out the ‘but’ actually lays more stress on the ‘grace’, and emphasises the contrast between that and ‘law’. It lays more stress on the ‘came’, and emphasises the contrast between that and the ‘given’. It lays more stress on ‘Jesus Christ’, and emphasises the contrast between him and ‘Moses’:

¹⁶ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p110.

¹⁷ See my comments on the verse in my *Christ*.

What Is Eternal Justification?

The **law** was **given** through **Moses**
Grace and truth **came** through **Jesus Christ**

And this is but one of many such occasions in Scripture.¹⁸

Thus 1 Corinthians 6:11. As Gill himself observed about these believing Corinthians:

[These] chosen vessels of salvation... are put in mind of their former state... what they once were... children of wrath, even as others... [in order] to... magnify the grace of God in their conversion, pardon, justification and salvation; as also to point out to them the obligations that lay upon them to live otherwise now than they formerly did.¹⁹

Quite! And do not miss Gill's use of 'now'!

However, before I develop my response to Gill, observe how Gill loaded his comments at the very start. He defined these

¹⁸ Let me quote my *Christ*: 'Take: "God be thanked that *though* you were the slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). To omit the *though* would be tantamount to making Paul say he was glad his readers had been the slaves of sin, when, in fact, he was thankful that *even though* they had been the slaves of sin, they had nevertheless obeyed the gospel. His argument hinges entirely on the *though*. If anybody dismisses the *though* as an English will o' the wisp, a mere technicality of the language, he virtually destroys what Paul actually said. Yet there is no "though" in the Greek text! As with the "but" in John 1:17, its absence speaks volumes. Similarly: "Though he was a Son, *yet* he learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). The *yet* is supplied, it is not in the original Greek, but by no stretch of the imagination can it be dismissed as trivial. In fact, its inclusion emphasises the amazing nature of what is being said. It is the most important word in the verse, even though the writer did not use it. Though Jesus was the Son of God, *even so, staggeringly, even he, yet he – he of all people* – learned obedience by the things which he suffered. A few more examples must suffice: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath" (Rom. 12:19). The *rather* gives the proper emphasis, but it is not in the original. Again, try leaving out the second *must* in John 3:30, *his* in John 6:52 (*his* is vital – any butcher can provide meat, but how could Jesus provide *his* own flesh for them to eat?), *as for* in John 9:29, *that is* in Eph. 2:15, *rather* in 1 Tim. 4:7 (AV), *and escape* in 2 Tim. 2:26 (the verse becomes nonsense otherwise), *because* in 2 Tim. 4:3; and so on. None of these words are in the Greek!'.
¹⁹ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p184.

Corinthians as these ‘chosen vessels of salvation’; in other words, the elect. They were, of course. I am not for a moment suggesting otherwise. But Paul was not writing to them as ‘elect’. He knew they were (1 Cor. 1:1,27-28), yes, but that is not the point. He was addressing them as believers; they had been called, and thus they had called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; they had received the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:2,9,26; 2:5,12; 3:16; for instance). So, I say, Paul was writing to them as believers. I would not raise this issue if it did not have a bearing on what we are talking about. But it does! Gill wanted to confine everything to eternity past. The apostle was dealing with men and women in the actual here and now of time. As we shall see, this is not the only occasion when Gill wanted to fight off all thought of ‘time’, ‘now’.

Putting that to one side, and accepting Gill’s way of addressing the Corinthians, when he said that they ‘are put in mind of their former state... what they once were... also to point out to them... to live otherwise now than they formerly did’, he was right. I agree! But if that is not talking about what they ‘once were’, and what they ‘are now’ – what they actually *were* in experience, and what they actually *are* in experience – then words have lost all meaning. And part of the ‘once were’ is that the Corinthians were not washed, they were not justified. And part of the ‘now’ is that the Corinthians are now washed, they are now justified. As I have pointed out, he himself used the ‘now’.

Gill, of course, recognised this. So how did he cope with it? His attempt to blunt the force of 1 Corinthians 6:11 was nothing more than special pleading. Worse, he was guilty of *incredible* pleading.

Let me make good my claim. Gill failed utterly to get to grips with Paul’s argument, when he (Gill) said: ‘They were now²⁰ justified, as if they were not justified before. But this... does not at all militate against justification before faith’. In other words, Gill declared that despite the plain teaching of the text, he could still argue for eternal justification – Paul’s words do not militate against it. Oh? Why not? Because, said Gill, Paul is speaking about the Corinthians being ‘now justified in their own consciences... which, it is plain, is the justification the apostle is here speaking of’.²¹

²⁰ Yet another ‘now’! There is more to come!

²¹ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp220-221.

What Is Eternal Justification?

Rubbish! If my ‘rubbish’ offends you, reader, I am afraid I do not apologise. Gill’s assertion was ridiculous, or worse. And in two respects. First, according to Gill, the Corinthians ‘were now justified, *as if* they were not justified before’? Really? ‘As if’? And, secondly, Gill confined the justification in question to the conscience. The Corinthians were ‘now justified in their own consciences... which, it is plain, is the justification the apostle is here speaking of’.

Let’s get some reality into this discussion. Take the first of Gill’s assertions – the ‘as if’. He was quite wrong! ‘As if’, indeed! Paul is telling the Corinthians that, before they believed, they *were not* washed, they were not justified, but now that they have believed they *are* washed and justified. There is no ‘as if’ about it. Reader, look at the biblical passage again and see. At one time, the Corinthians were unwashed, unsanctified and unjustified. Clearly, the apostle is speaking of the Corinthians’ actual experience. Having come to faith in Christ, the Corinthians are washed, are sanctified, and are justified. He is speaking about their personal experience. I say it again, there is no ‘as if’ about any of this.

Again, think about Gill’s assertion that the Corinthians are ‘now justified in their own consciences... which, it is plain, is the justification the apostle is here speaking of’. Is that what Paul is teaching? Is it ‘plain’? No! Most decidedly, no! The apostle is ‘plainly’ *not* speaking of ‘their conscience’. The notion is risible.²² The idea that before conversion, a sinner is worried about the fact that he is not justified, but after conversion, his conscience is at peace about it, and that is what Paul is saying here... Words fail! Before conversion, it is exceedingly unlikely that the Corinthians were at all bothered by the fact that they were not washed, sanctified and justified! Not at all. No! In common with all sinners, they would have revelled in their sin (Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Pet. 4:3-4).²³ And after conversion, the washing, justification, and such like, is far more than a feeling in the conscience!

²² I am not dismissing the ‘conscience’ – see the many scriptures which refer to it. But this is not germane here.

²³ A ‘Corinthian’, a by-word for a profligate, a dissipated man, a hedonist, a pleasure-seeker, a pagan.

The Principles

Until the elect believe, they are unjustified. The apostle is speaking experimentally, of experience. He is speaking really, actually. Having believed, the Corinthians are justified. It is not a matter of appearance ('as if') or conscience. It is a matter of *fact*, a matter of actual personal experience, a reality. Paul is not addressing the Corinthians about the *change in their conscience* – he is demanding that they live in accordance with what *they actually are now*, and not go back to living as they were once did – before they had come to faith (and been washed, sanctified and justified). Paul is speaking about a real change which comes at the point of faith – actual conversion – not an 'as if'. And the rest of their life must demonstrate it.

Parallel passages confirm it. In Romans 6:22, Paul tells believers: 'But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life'. Is this to be read as: 'But now having been set free from sin *in your conscience*, and having become slaves of God *in your conscience*, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life'? Or: 'But now *as if* having been set free from sin, and *as if* having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life'?

Again, must we read Ephesians 5:8: 'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord', thus: 'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord *in your conscience*'? Or: 'For you were once darkness, but now *it is as if* you are light in the Lord'?

Consider Titus 3:3-7:

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Do we have to understand that Paul says all this as having taken place *in the conscience*, or *as if* it had happened?

What Is Eternal Justification?

Does Peter, in 1 Peter 2:10, tell believers: You ‘once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy’ *as if you have... and in your conscience?* The notion is ridiculous. And take 1 Peter 4:1-4. Not an easy passage to unravel, I agree, but the point I am making stands out clear enough, I think.

The apostles were speaking of an actual experience of conversion, not ‘as if’ something had happened, nor of a sensation in the conscience. And, to take up Peter’s quotation which he extends from the Proverbs (Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22), until the pig is washed, it wallows in the mire. It is only after it has been washed that it is clean. Are we talking about a pig’s conscience? Was the pig always clean, but didn’t realise it? Or was it then when the pig was washed, he appeared – ‘as if’ – to be clean?

As in 1 Corinthians 6:11, so in all these passages, Scripture goes on to press the consequent sanctification upon believers: You were – but now you are... therefore ‘you have your fruit to holiness... Walk as children of light... Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works... Abstain from fleshly lusts...’ (Rom. 6:22; Eph. 5:8; Tit. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:11). Because of this glorious change in your life, because you have been converted, because you have become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), live it out! There is no ‘as if’ or ‘in your conscience’ about all this. Scripture speaks of a real change produced, in time, at the point of faith; that is, conversion. Before faith, the sinner is not justified. After faith, he is. That is what conversion is! And *that* is the teaching of 1 Corinthians 6:11. Before believing, no sinner is justified; by believing, he is. And now that he is justified, he must go on to sanctification.

Gill was wrong. But this was not the first passage upon which he came a cropper over the issue. He had also dismally failed to get to grips with the ‘now’ – or was determined not to get to grips with it – in a verse in which its presence is beyond dispute; namely, Romans 8:1. A small, but vital word, this ‘now’. As the apostle declared: ‘Therefore is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus’.²⁴ Let us look at the verse.

²⁴ Before publication, one of my readers pointed out that I had omitted the ‘in’. I laughed out loud when I saw it. And then something wonderful

Romans 8:1

Peter Naylor perceptively noted that Gill failed to mention the verse in his *published* sermon on justification – a truly remarkable omission by so painstaking a teacher as Gill. Not only that. Naylor also pointed out that Gill, when he tackled the verse in his *Complete Body of Divinity*, ‘misquoted Paul to suit his own exposition’, leaving out the ‘now’ in his argument.²⁵ Remarkable – or worse!

Ella responded to the criticism,²⁶ but he in his turn also failed to get to grips with the point Paul is making in Romans 8. I have said much more on the vital ‘now’ in my *Christ is All* – which see – but to omit the ‘now’ in Romans 8:1 (see also the ‘but now’ – or, in the context, ‘now’ – of Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10),²⁷ or even to fail to give it its due weight, is to make a travesty of the argument in all these passages. Which is? The momentous eschatological change brought about by the first coming of Christ. See Galatians 3:19-25. The ‘but now’ of Romans is crucial in the dispensational sense, the epochal sense, in the change of covenant brought about by the first coming of Christ. In a personal sense, too, the ‘but now’, the ‘now’, is vital; glorious, indeed. Until the sinner is brought to faith, he is in Adam,²⁸ under the law and condemned. ‘But now’ that he is brought to faith, he is in Christ, he is no longer under the law, no longer condemned; he is justified. If you have any doubts, reader, go over Paul’s complete argument (Rom. 3:21 – 8:4) – *and do so out loud*. Such a perusal will amply prove the point I am making.

dawned on me: they who are in Christ are seen by God as Christ, and, therefore, as laughable as it is to think that anybody might doubt that Christ is utterly beyond condemnation, *the same applies absolutely to the believer*. And I mean ‘absolutely’.

²⁵ Naylor pp175-176,251. See Gill: *Body* Vol.3 p300. As I see it, to miss out such an important word in such a major verse, dealing with such a vital topic, leaves his *Complete Body* a little short of complete!

²⁶ Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp143-144.

²⁷ 1 Pet. 2:10 does not have the ‘now’ but it is clearly implied.

²⁸ I will have more to say on ‘in Adam’ in the next chapter.

What Is Eternal Justification?

Gill failed utterly and abysmally to spell this out. He simply would not – or could not – face up to the implications of the ‘now’ of Romans 8:1. When, in his *Commentary*, he tackled the verse, he summarily dismissed the idea that ‘now’ has any reference to time. He certainly and decidedly rejected its true and proper meaning in the context. Why, he flew directly in the face of that context! Listen to him:

Which ‘now’ must not be considered as if it supposes that there was formerly condemnation to them... This ‘now’ is not an adverb of time, but a note of illation [inference, deduction].²⁹

How wrong can one get! I cannot find words strong enough to express my rejection of this rank special pleading. Such a claim could only be made by a man who is determined to defend his system at all costs – even at the cost of driving a coach and horses through Scripture. I say it again, a reading of Romans 3:21 – 8:4 (noting, especially, Rom. 3:21; 5:11; 6:22; 7:6; and outside that range, Rom. 16:26), will make everything clear.

Before the Romans believed, they were under condemnation. In the following chapter, I will have more to say about this. But that is what Paul is saying in Romans 8:1. Before the Romans believed, they were under condemnation; after believing, now that they believe, they are not. Contrary to Gill, the ‘now’ definitely *is* ‘an adverb of time’ here. An adverb of time is the very thing that it is! This is the point; precisely the point! ‘Now’ is not a linguistic or logical makeweight. It may be a very short word, but in Romans it carries enormous overtones which resonate throughout the New Testament. And down the centuries since. If it were not for the glorious, triumphant ‘but now’ and ‘now’ of Romans, we should have no gospel at all. I will return to this vital eschatological note. The importance of the ‘now’ cannot be over-stated. It certainly can be under-stated! As Gill only too amply showed, it can be dismissed! And to dismiss the ‘now’ is to write off far more than three little marks on a page, or even a note of illation!

Let me remind you, reader, what we are talking about. The elect sinner is justified in eternity in God’s decree. He is justified in Christ in the Saviour’s death and resurrection. But he is only

²⁹ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p55.

actually justified when, by God's grace, through the sovereign Spirit, he personally repents and believes. Before he believes, he is not actually justified. But now that he believes, he is justified. Do not miss the 'now'! Until a sinner can talk of his 'then' and 'now', his experience of 'before faith' and 'after faith', he is unconverted and unjustified.³⁰

At this point, it is imperative that I make one thing as clear as I can. In saying this about faith and justification, I most definitely am not making faith a condition of justification in the sense that faith is its root or cause or basis. No. Not at all. Let me spell out what I am saying.

Faith is not the cause of justification

The cause of justification is God's grace, God's love in his electing and predestinating decree (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4; 2:4,8; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; *etc.*). It is not faith. I cannot put it more bluntly than Gill himself: Faith has 'no causal influence on justification, nor does it add anything to its being'.³¹ And: 'It is God, and not faith, that justifies... Faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified, from the God of its salvation'.³² On this, the hyper-Calvinist and I are one. Faith is the means, the hand, by which justification is received, nothing more. *But nothing less.*

Faith *is* the means of justification. Until they come to faith, the elect are not actually united to Christ, they are not actually justified. For the elect sinner, this change in his experience takes place only when and as he believes. God is 'the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26), not the one who is predestined to have faith in Jesus. Until an elect sinner believes, he is as yet actually unjustified, even though God has eternally determined to save him, and Christ has accomplished his redemption.

But, I say again, faith is not the cause of justification. Electing grace is! God does not justify a sinner *because* the sinner believes –

³⁰ I am not saying he must be able to specify the day and the hour, but he must have this change.

³¹ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p104. See also Gill: *Body* p67; *Commentary* Vol.6 pp21-23,30; *Sermons* Vol.4 pp184-187.

³² Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp187,199.

What Is Eternal Justification?

but he does justify him *when* he believes. God does not accept faith as a substitute for works. Can I put it any more plainly? Have I stopped up every loophole? Have I cut off every escape route? I certainly hope so. I have tried to! Unless a sinner believes, he will not be justified, but no sinner is justified because he believes. He is justified only and entirely by grace because God the Father elected him, God the Son died for him, and God the Holy Spirit works in him.

An objection

But what of the apostle's statement that 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness', quoting Genesis 15:6 (Rom. 4:3,5,9,22-25; Gal. 3:6)? Does this mean that faith, after all, *is* the basis upon which God justifies the elect?

Not at all! God does not accept our faith as a substitute for good works upon which to base justification. Our salvation has been earned by good works, yes – Christ's good works under the law (Gal. 4:4-5) – but God does not account our faith to us as righteousness in the sense of treating it as the basis of justification. This has been taught by some, and it is quite wrong. It would be to fly directly in the face of the context of Romans 4 and Galatians 3 (in both, the apostle quoted the words) – which is that there is no justification by our works, but it is entirely by grace.

So what does 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' mean? Why did Paul quote Genesis 15:6 when arguing his case in both Romans 4 and Galatians 3? Clearly he regarded it as a clinching proof of what he was saying.³³ There are two main views. Some think that the apostle was talking about Abraham's 'faith' in the objective sense – *what* (or, rather, *who*) he believed. Others think the apostle was referring to Abraham's

³³ Significantly, Paul did not quote Ps. 106:30-31. That would not have established his case; it would have destroyed it. But that passage does not refer to justification. Phinehas was commended and rewarded as a righteous man for his zealous act proving his dedication to God. A very different issue. James quoted Gen. 15:6 (Jas. 2:23) when referring to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, arguing that while faith is the means of justification, obedience is the evidence of it.

The Principles

‘faith’ in the subjective sense – the fact that he was a believer. Scripture uses ‘faith’ in both senses. So which is it here?

Gill was of the objective school:

It was the promised seed, the Messiah, and his righteousness, which Abraham, by faith, looked unto, and believed in, that was made unto him righteousness by imputation. Now since so great and good a man as Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith in the righteousness of the Messiah, it follows that none of his sons, nor any other persons whatever, ought to seek for, or expect to be justified in any other way.³⁴

Calvin’s editor was of a similar mind:

What is believed, or the object of faith, is what is counted for righteousness. This accords with the declarations that ‘man is justified by faith’ (Rom. 3:28), and that ‘the righteousness of God’ is ‘by faith’ (Rom. 3:22). If *by* faith, then faith itself is not that righteousness.³⁵

In other words, Christ and his righteousness are accounted to the believer.

John Brown disagreed. Though, of course, he agreed with the claim that Christ and his righteousness are accounted to the believer, nevertheless, on the verse, he was of the subjective school:

Abraham believed God: God reckoned Abraham a believer, and as a believer he was justified by God... This passage... shows... that Abraham was justified, not by works, but by faith – not by obeying the law, but believing the promise – not as a worker, but as a believer.³⁶

As was J.Gresham Machen:

Abraham believed the promise, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness – that is, it was through his faith, not through any good works of his, that he was made right with God.³⁷

I myself am convinced that the subjective view has more to commend it. But, which of the two it is, until an elect sinner believes, he is as yet actually unjustified, even though God has

³⁴ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p25.

³⁵ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p158, emphasis his. See Murray: *Romans* Vol.1 pp131-132; *Redemption* pp122-128.

³⁶ Brown: *Galatians* pp118-119.

³⁷ Skilton p174.

eternally determined to save him, and Christ has accomplished his redemption. And since, as I have made clear, justification is by union with Christ, that sentence could be re-phrased. Until an elect sinner believes, he is as yet not united to Christ, he is not yet actually ‘in Christ’, even though God has eternally determined to save him. The hyper-Calvinist, however, claims that the elect have always actually been ‘in Christ’, even from eternity. This is wrong.

A sinner is actually ‘in Christ’ only upon his believing

What is the sinner and where is he, then, before being regenerated and coming to faith? Although I will have more to say about this in the following chapter, let me summarise briefly. Before believing, the sinner is in Adam, separate from Christ. As the apostle reminds the Ephesians (Eph. 2:1-3, 11-12), in the days of their unregeneracy and unbelief, ‘at that time you were without Christ’, ‘apart from’, ‘separate from Christ’ (NIV, NASB).³⁸ In saying this, Paul is addressing the Ephesians as the believing elect. Indeed, what he goes on to say is applicable only to the believing elect – the non-elect are never regenerated and never do come to faith! The believing elect, however, at God’s appointed moment, do come to faith. And when they come to faith, as the apostle immediately goes on to say, while at one time they were separate from Christ, ‘but now in Christ Jesus...’ (Eph. 2:13).

As William Gadsby put it:

The apostle is here, in the first place, addressing the church at Ephesus... But the text is applicable to us all: ‘At that time we were without Christ’. At what time? In our unregenerated [and unbelieving] state. Then we were without Christ... What we were in the purpose of God, what we were as viewed by him in Christ before the foundation of the world, is another thing altogether; he is not talking about that, but what we were manifestively [better, actually]... ‘Without God in the world’. If we are without God... O, what an awful thing! By and by we shall have to stretch ourselves upon a dying bed and... drop into eternity. What will become of us then, if we are without God as our God? Without God. This is the state we are all in by nature.³⁹

³⁸ *chōris*, separate, apart, apart from (see Thayer).

³⁹ Gadsby: *Sermons* pp266-270.

The Principles

If Gadsby had used ‘actually’ instead of ‘manifestively’, I should have little quarrel with him here.

When commenting on the passage, Gill, however, was very careful to protect his back. What he said was true, but it is what he did *not* say that is vital here:

‘Without Christ’... or separate from him: they were chosen in him and were preserved in him, and were redeemed by him before; but they were without any knowledge of him, faith in him, love to him, communion with him, or subjection to him, his gospel, government, laws, and ordinances... ‘Without God in the world’; without the knowledge of God in Christ; without the image of God, which was defaced by sin; without the grace and fear of God; and without communion with him, and the worship of him; and while they were so, they were in the world, among the men of it, and were a part of it, not being yet called out of it... ‘But now in Christ Jesus’... Being openly and visibly in Christ, created in him, and become believers in him; as they were before secretly in him, as chosen and blessed in him before the foundation of the world.⁴⁰

As I say, all this is true – but, in Ephesians 2, Paul is reminding the Ephesians of what they *actually* were before believing and what they *actually* are after believing. He is not speaking in terms of what they were *secretly* and what they now are *openly*. Before believing, the elect are not brought near (Eph. 2:13), they have no access to God (Eph. 2:18), they are not members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). Once they believe, however... The change which comes as they believe is not simply a matter of conscience or manifestation. It is actual! And actual union with Christ takes place at believing, not in eternity. Before they believe, they are not actually in Christ.

Now, although Gill almost constantly argued for actual eternal union with Christ – by which, he meant the elect are actually ‘in Christ’ from eternity – he sometimes slipped up, forgot himself and his system, and contradicted himself.⁴¹ As he did, for example, on

⁴⁰ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p428.

⁴¹ As Fuller observed on a related point (Fuller: *Worthy* p163). I fear that Spurgeon, who had spotted the same, was over-generous in exonerating Gill: ‘The system of theology with which many identify his [Gill’s] name has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has led them to omit the

What Is Eternal Justification?

Paul's words to the Romans: 'Greet Andronicus and Junia... who... were in Christ before me' (Rom. 16:7). A simple statement, it might be thought, one without much theological implication. Let us see. Gems can be wrapped in brown paper!

As I have pointed out, 'in Christ' is a scriptural phrase, appearing nearly 250 times in the New Testament, carrying massive overtones. Gill, commenting on Romans 16:7, and sensing, I suspect, the thinness of the ice upon which he was treading, and therefore employing the principle of 'argument weak, use plenty of words', in the midst of this pile of words, gave us a classic statement – one that destroyed his system! He claimed that Paul was speaking about: 'To be brought to believe in him [Christ], even in him for righteousness, pardon, peace, acceptance and eternal life'.⁴²

Reader, please note what Gill said. 'To be brought to believe in him [Christ], even in him for righteousness, pardon, peace, acceptance and eternal life'. That is what he said. And he was perfectly right, was he not? Of course he was. But, in saying it, he was utterly contradicting himself.

But it was not the only time he did it:

True faith... is... a believing with all the heart... to receive... even the righteousness of Christ, which when it spies, it admires, receives, lays hold on, and rejoices in looking on itself as righteous through this righteousness, and so has peace with God through Christ...

They... not only sought for, but obtained what they sought for... even a justifying righteousness in him...

True faith in him as the Messiah is a believing with the heart unto righteousness, or a looking to, and trusting in the righteousness of Christ for justification; and a dealing with his blood for pardon and

free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus: but for this Dr Gill must not be altogether held responsible, for a candid reader of his *Commentary* will soon perceive in it expressions altogether out of accord with such a narrow system; and it is well known that when he was dealing with practical godliness he was so bold in his utterances that the devotees of hyper-Calvinism could not endure him. "Well, Sir", said one of these, "if I had not been told that it was the great Dr Gill who preached, I should have said I had heard an Arminian" (Spurgeon: *History* p47).

⁴² Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p143.

cleansing, under a sense of guilt and filth; and a laying hold on his atoning sacrifice for the expiation of sin, and peace with God; and a reception of him as the only Saviour and Redeemer, or a dependence on him for life and salvation; and which faith shows itself in love to him, and in a professed subjection to his gospel, and cheerful submission to his ordinances.⁴³

Let me explain. On his system, when commenting on Romans 16:7, Gill should have said: ‘To be brought to believe in him [Christ], even in him for *the sense of, the conviction of, the manifestation of, the sense of, the assurance of, the realisation of the fact that they have actually had* righteousness, pardon, peace, acceptance and eternal life *having been in him from all eternity*’. He should have talked about ‘the conscience’, or ‘as if’. *But he forgot to say it.* And instead, what he actually did say – ‘to be brought to believe in him [Christ], even in him for righteousness, pardon, peace, acceptance and eternal life’ – shattered his hyper-Calvinism. The same goes for the other extracts just quoted.

The fact is, until the elect believe, they are not actually ‘in Christ’, they are not actually righteous, they are not actually pardoned, they are not actually acceptable to God, and they do not actually have eternal life. In God’s decree, they have all this and more, yes, but until they believe, and are actually ‘in Christ’, they actually have none of it. I deliberately stress the ‘actually’. And Gill, in the above comment, contrary to his own doctrine, was in agreement.

Not surprisingly, therefore, though, in God’s decree, all the elect are eternally ‘in Christ’, some are actually ‘in Christ’ before others, in that some come to faith before others. Quite. This is what Paul meant in Romans 16:7, and this is what he said: ‘Andronicus and Junia... were in Christ before me’. They were converted before I was. That is what the apostle was saying. Andronicus, Junia and Paul were all in Christ in God’s decree in eternity – there was no before or after in that – but Andronicus and Junia came to faith before Paul did, and, therefore they were actually in Christ before he was. That is what the apostle said, and that is what he meant.

All the elect are elected at once – in eternity, of course – but they are converted, and actually come into Christ, in time – at

⁴³ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 pp89,374,906.

What Is Eternal Justification?

different times. Some are ‘in Christ’ before others. And that, without question, is what Scripture always says. A man is only ‘in Christ’ when he believes. Naturally, therefore, if I believe before Joe Bloggs (or John Doe), I am ‘in Christ’ before Joe Bloggs. God decreed us both to be ‘in Christ’ in eternity, yes, but we are only actually ‘in Christ’ as we come to faith. ‘For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ⁴⁴ have put on Christ’ (Gal. 3:26-27). ‘You... were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed...’ (Eph. 1:13, NIV). Note the ‘when’: no man is actually ‘in Christ’ until he believes, and it is only by believing that he is actually ‘in Christ’. In this sense, he is ‘in Christ’ when he believes – and not before.

I stress this because being ‘in Christ’ and being justified are Siamese twins. Justification is by union with Christ. A man ‘in Christ’ is justified; a justified man is ‘in Christ’. Being ‘in Christ’ and being justified, therefore, is by faith. No sinner is elect before another, but one elect sinner can quite easily be in Christ before another. Andronicus and Junia were in Christ before Paul, but Paul was in Christ before Luther, for instance, and Luther was in Christ before any saint living today.

Hyper-Calvinists do not accept this. Determined, at all costs, to preserve the logical consistency of their theological system, they cannot possibly accept it. They say all the elect are *actually* ‘in Christ’ and justified at the same ‘time’ – *from eternity*. This is what they mean by ‘eternal justification’. On this basis, nobody could be ‘in Christ’ before anybody else.

But if Paul had taught the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification, he would never have observed that certain people *were* in Christ before he was. All the elect have always been ‘in Christ’, from before the beginning of time, according to the hyper-Calvinist. The fact remains, however, that Paul said what he said, said what he meant, and meant what he said. Therefore an elect sinner is only actually in Christ as and when he believes. The same goes for justification. No man is actually justified until he believes.

⁴⁴ This is *not* water baptism. It is regeneration.

The Principles

Consider Paul's words to Titus, to which I have already referred:

When the kindness and the love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:4-7).

Note how justification follows regeneration. And not only in the 'accident of words', as it were. Paul's argument absolutely depends on it. *First*, we have the kindness and the love of God our Saviour. Here we are speaking of eternity past. *Then* the kindness and the love of God our Saviour appeared. Now we are speaking of time, the incarnation leading to the death and resurrection of Christ. *After which*, in accordance with his mercy God saved us – that is, he regenerated us by his Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us through Christ. In other words, we are now speaking of our experience. The result? We are justified. And, having been justified, we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It is as plain as a pikestaff – justification follows regeneration. Justification follows faith, without question, but that is not the issue Paul is dealing with here – although, within the same breath, he moves on to it: 'Those who have believed in God' (Tit. 3:8). The fact is, until he is regenerated and brought to faith in Christ, the elect sinner is unjustified. This is what Paul says. Regeneration, faith, justification, and in that order.

Let me make the point by asking a question. Is the elect sinner regenerated in eternity? Of course not. If it were so, Christ would never had told Nicodemus – and, for that matter, every man:

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Unless one is born of water⁴⁵ and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: 'You must be born again' (John 3:3-7).

If the advocates of eternal justification are right, Christ would have told Nicodemus that he was already born again, and had been so

⁴⁵ This is not water baptism.

What Is Eternal Justification?

from eternity. In fact, he had never been anything other than born again, but that he had to be brought to realise it. In other words, Christ would have said something like: ‘Unless a man is *brought to realise, to have the manifestation, that he has been born again from eternity*, he cannot see the kingdom of God... he cannot enter the kingdom of God... “You must *come to realise that, to have the manifestation that*, you were born again in eternity”’. But Christ said nothing of the sort. What he did say was that all men are born in the flesh, and need to be born again – and this is as much true of the elect as it is of any sinner.

The hyper-Calvinistic magazine, the *Gospel Standard*, in its early days while still under William and John Gadsby, admitted as much: ‘When a natural child is born into the world, it is born body and soul together; this is its natural and first birth, and is common to all the human race; and when the elect of God are regenerated and born spiritually by the Spirit of God, this is being born again or [a] second time’.⁴⁶

Just so. Natural birth must precede spiritual re-birth. Only living – in a natural sense, though dead in a spiritual sense – sinners can be regenerated. A man can be born again only if he has been born once. Regeneration, then, must be an experience firmly located in time. It therefore cannot be from eternity. Yet, according to Titus 3:4-7, justification arises after regeneration. The actual experience of being justified, therefore, must be firmly located in time, not in eternity.

Consider: ‘And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked... we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh... But God... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive’ (Eph. 2:1-5). Is it not clear? God regenerates these who are actually dead in sins. God regenerates those who are living – existing – as sinners who are ‘walking’, ‘conducting’ themselves, in the lusts of the flesh. All this speaks of actual experience in the here and now. What is more, God regenerates those who are dead, not only in sins, but in *trespasses* and sins. Now a trespass, a transgression, is only properly defined in reference to the law (Rom. 4:15; 5:13). And the giving of the law

⁴⁶ *Gospel Standard* 1838 p235.

The Principles

was firmly located in time and place – Sinai (Rom. 5:12-14). God regenerates those who, by nature, are spiritually dead, and who, by practice, live a life of sin and trespass. In short, regeneration cannot possibly have taken place in eternity past. It was decreed in eternity past, yes, but it must take place, it can only take place, in time.

Isaac Watts got it right. God chose all his elect, at once, in eternity, but they are actually regenerated by degrees, in time:

*Jesus, we bless thy Father's name;
Thy God and ours are both the same;
What heavenly blessings from his throne
Flow down to sinners through his Son!*

*'Christ be my first elect', he said,
Then chose our souls in Christ our head,
Before he gave the mountains birth,
Or laid foundations for the earth.*

*Thus did eternal love begin
To raise us up from death and sin;
Our characters were then decreed,
'Blameless in love, a holy seed'.*

*Predestinated to be sons,
Born by degrees, but chose at once;
A new regenerated race,
To praise the glory of his grace.⁴⁷*

All the elect were elected at once, in eternity; they are regenerated, however, in time, at individual stages. If I may illustrate: Like beads, in eternity they were all elected to be put onto the string, but as individual beads added to the string one by one, they are regenerated in time.

Consider: 'For this reason [Christ] is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9:15). Who are 'those who are called'? In using the word 'called', the writer is not referring to the general call of the gospel. No. He is speaking of the inward, effectual call of the elect to saving faith and

⁴⁷ *Gospel Hymns* number 456. By the way, hyper-Calvinists sing it from *Gadsby's Hymns* number 73.

What Is Eternal Justification?

repentance. ‘The called’ in this context are those who are effectively called under the gospel – the believing elect. The elect, when they are effectively called, are brought to repentance and faith, washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, and receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. So far, so good. Surely, all are agreed. This is what Hebrews 9:15 is saying. It teaches that the new covenant was planned in eternity, was accomplished through the mediator in his incarnation, death and resurrection, is experienced by the elect in time (when they are called) (see also Heb. 9:26), and will be fulfilled in eternity.

Very well. Although the word does not appear in Hebrews 9:15, *the same applies to justification*, as it does for sealing, adoption, and so on. In particular, despite the fact that there is an eternal aspect to justification, until a sinner believes he is not actually justified.

Interestingly, the inspired writer immediately goes on to furnish us with a superb everyday illustration of the point (Heb. 9:16-17). According to the NKJV (see also AV and NASB), this reads: ‘Where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives’. Now, as with the NIV, it is generally agreed that ‘will’, not ‘testament’, is the right translation of the word in question: ‘In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living’. Within the usual limits of any illustration, this admirably makes the point. A man bequeaths his estate. It is certain that the heir will receive it. But until the testator dies, the beneficiary is not in actual possession. When the testator dies, however, the beneficiary does receive the estate – and then he can begin to enjoy its benefits. The parallel? From eternity, the elect are guaranteed justification, but they only receive it when they believe. Having believed and been justified, they then enjoy its fruits.

In passing, if justification *is* eternal, then, as Herman Bavinck said: ‘If one speaks of justification as eternal, he should

The Principles

consistently also speak of creation, incarnation, sacrifice, calling and regeneration as eternal'.⁴⁸ I leave that thought for later.

In all this, not for a moment am I denying the eternal aspect of justification. I hope I have made that plain enough by now! But until the sinner – elect or not – trusts Christ, he is not actually justified. In fact, he is, as all men by nature, in an appalling position. His standing before God is indescribably bad. And in saying this, I am not talking merely about his circumstances. I am being precise. An unbeliever's *status* before God is one of unspeakable ghastliness. And this goes for the elect sinner who is as yet unbelieving. *His* status is indescribably bad.

It is about time we looked at what Scripture says about *that*.

⁴⁸ See Berkouwer p147.

I... send you to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me

Acts 26:17-18

Remember that... at that time you were without Christ... strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ

Ephesians 2:11-13

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

As we have seen, the elect sinner, until he believes, is not *actually* justified.¹ He is, of course, justified in God's eternal decree and in Christ's redemptive work, but he is, as yet, unjustified in his own person. Since every unjustified sinner is under condemnation, every unbeliever is in that state. It is only as he believes that a sinner passes from condemnation and is justified. This, in turn, means that the elect sinner, before he comes to faith, is as much under the wrath of God as any sinner.

It is not just a question of deduction. Scripture states it explicitly. Take Ephesians 2:1-3:

And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Paul, addressing believers, the elect who have been regenerated and come to faith,² reminds them of their experience. And he is unequivocal about it. He tells them what they once were – in the days of their unregeneracy. Further, he tells them the sort of people among whom they used to live. What is more, he tells them the kind of life they lived in those days. Above all, he tells them of their condition and their status before God at that time. And he is explicit, pulling no punches. All men are by nature under the wrath of God, of course. These believers were no exception. Before they were regenerated, before they came to faith, they too – like all men – were under the wrath of God. In fact, Paul stresses the point. More. It *is* his point. The Ephesians 'were', he tells them, 'by nature the children of wrath, *just as the others*'. Indeed, he includes

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p197.

² Faith is not in the passage, but it clearly underlies the context (Eph. 1:1,12-13,15; 2:8; 3:12).

The Principles

himself: 'We all... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others' (Eph. 2:3).

In other words, all this is true for all the elect before they come to faith. Paul is categorical: 'We all... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others'. It makes no difference whether or not a sinner is elect; by nature he is under the wrath of God – as much as any sinner. In this sense, all men are proverbial peas in a pod.

As the apostle said elsewhere, God formed 'the vessels of mercy' (that is, the elect) 'from the same lump' as 'the vessels of wrath'. 'From the same lump', please notice. That is, in eternity, in his sovereign foreknowledge, purpose and will, God chose his elect out of the lump of fallen humanity – they were as much part of the lump as the rest – and predestinated them to form them into vessels of mercy. God, having chosen his elect from the lump, left the rest as the vessels of wrath (Rom. 9:21-23).

So, when the elect are born into this world, they are, in themselves, under the wrath of God, even though God has eternally chosen and appointed them to be vessels of mercy. Thus they remain, until they are brought to faith. In short, the elect, before conversion – every bit as much as the non-elect – are by nature under the wrath of God, part of the fallen lump of humanity in Adam – notwithstanding the fact that God has predestined them to everlasting life. Until they come to faith in Christ, the elect are still in the kingdom of darkness and under the condemnation of God.

Paul went on to remind the Ephesians of their pre-conversion days: 'Remember that... at that time you were without Christ... strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ' (Eph. 2:11-13). Before faith, the elect are outside Christ, separated from God, hopeless and spiritually ignorant – as much as any sinner.

This is confirmed to us by the apostle's declaration to the Colossian believers. News reached Paul that the Colossians had heard the gospel and come to faith under it. He rejoiced in this, and was able to link himself with them and assure them that God 'has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love' (Col. 1:3-13). When were the Colossians transferred into Christ's kingdom? As they believed:

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

‘We give thanks to... God... praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus... He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love’. Of course the apostle rejoiced! The Colossians’ experience was the heart of the commission he had received from the Lord Christ at Damascus: ‘I... send you to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26:17-18). He was, therefore, delighted when he heard of any sinner being delivered from Satan’s power, and brought into Christ’s kingdom.

Here is the principle. At the appointed time – in time and experience – God delivers his elect out of one kingdom – darkness – into another kingdom, a very different kingdom – Christ’s. He delivers them from Satan’s power to Christ’s. He does this as and when he brings the elect to faith. Before they believe, therefore, the elect are as much in, and as much part of, the kingdom of darkness as any sinner. They are, as much as any sinner, under Satan’s power, blinded in unbelief, and on the road to perdition (2 Cor. 4:3-4).³ Until sinners are effectively called, they are in darkness, cut off from God, without Christ. It is only after they are called, and come to faith, that it can be said of the elect: ‘God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor. 1:9).

In short, the elect – along with all sinners – before being born again and coming to faith, are part and parcel of the lump of fallen humanity, members of the kingdom of darkness, under Satan, condemned under the wrath of God. This the Scriptures unequivocally and repeatedly declare.

No, says the hyper-Calvinist. Not at all. The elect never were part of the lump of fallen humanity, never in the same lump as they. The elect never were in the kingdom of darkness. The elect never were under the wrath of God, never condemned. The elect were

³ Not that they will perish, of course. But since an unbeliever is an unbeliever, and there is no way of telling if he is elect except by his believing, he is on the road to perdition. That is how it appears to him and to everybody else.

always justified. Gill was blunt and unequivocal: ‘The elect... never were in a state of condemnation’.⁴

But what about all the above passages? What others?⁵ In particular, what about Ephesians 2:1-3? Surely this must put the nail in the hyper-Calvinist’s coffin? How did Gill deal with this passage?

Gill on Ephesians 2:1-3

Gill, I remind you, asserted that ‘the elect... never were in a state of condemnation’. So what did he make of: We ‘were by nature the children of wrath, even as others’ (Eph. 2:3, AV)? He conjured up an astonishing, as well as lamentably weak, interpretation of the verse:

By which is meant, not only that they [the elect] were wrathful persons[!]... but that they [the elect] were deserving of the wrath of God.⁶

And it is not the only time he said it: ‘By nature [the saints] are... deserving of the wrath of God’.⁷

This is quite wrong. Truth to tell, it takes my breath away! It was unworthy of so pedantic a commentator. How could Gill say such a thing? The elect ‘were wrathful persons... deserving of the wrath of God’? These two assertions must be probed and exposed: The elect ‘were wrathful persons’, and were ‘deserving of the wrath of God’. Let me take them in order:

First, before coming to faith, the ‘elect were wrathful persons’. Wrathful persons? The Ephesians were angry people? Is that what Paul is saying? Words fail. True enough, the elect – as all men – were ‘wrathful persons’, angry people (Tit. 3:3), yes, but that is not what the apostle is talking about in Ephesians 2:1-3. Certainly not!

Gill, commenting on Titus 3:3, observed that the elect, before conversion, were ‘abominable in the sight of God, as considered in themselves, and on account of their nature and practices’.⁸ Quite

⁴ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p55.

⁵ See below.

⁶ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p425.

⁷ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p505.

⁸ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p669.

right. That is precisely what the apostle is saying in Titus 3:3. *But he is not dealing with that in 'were dead in trespasses and sins... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others' (Eph. 2:1-3).* I agree that in Ephesians 2:1-3 (excluding these two clauses – 'were dead... were by nature...'), Paul is dealing with the lifestyle of the unregenerate, yes. But in these two clauses he is most definitely dealing with their *standing* before God. Whereas in Titus 3:3 the apostle is speaking of the lifestyle and manners of the elect ('considered in themselves') before conversion, in these two clauses in Ephesians 2:1-3, he is undoubtedly speaking of their *standing* before God before their conversion. Something very different! In their experience before conversion, they were angry people, yes (Tit. 3:3), but, in their standing before God prior to their conversion, they 'were dead in trespasses and sins' and 'were by nature children of wrath, just as the others' (Eph. 2:1,3). In short, they were unregenerate and under God's wrath.

Gill confused the sinner's condition and the sinner's status. I have already hinted at this nice point. When speaking of 'condition', we are thinking of lifestyle, circumstances, situation. When speaking of 'status', we are thinking of standing, relationship, category, position. In everyday parlance, 'condition' and 'status' may be virtually interchangeable, but, when dealing with the issue in hand, we must be careful to distinguish the two. In his natural condition, the sinner is a sinful being, displaying all sorts of ungodliness in his life. In his natural status before God, he is in Adam, unregenerate and condemned under God's wrath.⁹ Every unbeliever is a child of (God's) wrath and is condemned: 'He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God' (John 3:18).

I noted that there were two points about Gill's interpretation of Ephesians 2:1-3. Now for the second. Before coming to faith, the elect 'were deserving of the wrath of God'. This is what Gill said.

⁹ Let me make a nice, but relevant and important point. I have skirted it once or twice already. The unbeliever is condemned already, even now (John 3:18,36). But he does not experience God's wrath to the full. Obviously so: he is on earth and not in hell! Likewise, the believer is justified now. But he is not yet in glory, and will not be fully justified until the last day.

The Principles

Note the glaring gloss. It is totally unwarranted, and a grievous imposition on the text.¹⁰ Gill said the elect were merely *deserving* of the wrath of God. I admit that Calvin said the same: ‘The children of wrath are those who are lost, and who deserve eternal death’, but he did not leave it there. As he went on to say: ‘The children of wrath are those who are condemned before God’.¹¹ To both men, I would point out that Paul asserts that believers, before coming to faith, are *under* the wrath of God, not merely deserving of it. And by ‘the children of wrath’, the apostle, using a Hebraism, a Jewish idiom, was in effect telling the Ephesians that as unbelievers they had been the ‘objects of God’s wrath’.¹² The NIV got it spot on: ‘By nature objects of wrath’ (Eph. 2:3, NIV). As with all men by nature, ‘the wrath of God abides on [them]’ (John 3:36).

Gill’s remarks smack of special pleading, desperate pleading. The fact is, I can hear a man who, finding himself in a difficult place, is scratching around for any convenient straw to lay his hands on. Gill has not been on his own. For other hyper-Calvinistic statements of a similar ilk, including one posted on the internet as recently as 2010, see the Extracts. I also quoted it in the Introduction.

At the risk of over-egging the pudding, I must repeat the apostle’s emphasis. It must not be missed. It is very important. Paul’s point in Ephesians 2:1-3 is not, merely, that all sinners are by nature under the wrath of God. Not at all! That is true, of course. But the apostle goes much further than that to tell us that *even the elect* are by nature like the rest – ‘just as the others’ – under the wrath of God. It is only after coming to faith that they – the elect – are no longer under that wrath.¹³

¹⁰ I admit the niceness of the difficulty here, as my previous note indicates. Nevertheless, Gill was frying another fish here.

¹¹ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.21 Part 1 p223.

¹² Hendriksen: *Ephesians* p116; Hodge: *Ephesians* p106. See the Extracts.

¹³ I do not agree with Calvin who thought Paul was speaking about Jews and Gentiles (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.21 Part 1 p223). At this point, the apostle was not dividing mankind in that way. Rather, he was referring to the elect and the reprobate.

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

What I am saying about the status of the unbeliever (elect or not) – being under God’s wrath and condemnation – does not depend on one text alone, of course; nor even one passage – though Ephesians 2 as a whole is replete with the doctrine (see my remarks on it in the previous chapter). The appalling status of the unbeliever (elect and non-elect alike) is clearly stated or implied in all the following:

God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). All our days have passed away in your wrath (Ps. 90:9). He who does not believe is condemned already... He who does not believe is condemned... the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:18,36). The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... Having been justified by faith... having now been justified... we shall be saved from wrath through [Christ] (Rom. 1:18; 5:1-9). The wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:6). The wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them (Col. 3:6-7). You turned to God... to wait for his Son... even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Only the most fatuous exegesis – or deliberate wrenching and distorting of Scripture – can avoid the obvious thrust of these passages. In particular: ‘He who does not believe’ – elect or not – ‘is condemned already’. ‘He who does not believe’ – elect or not – ‘the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:18,36).¹⁴ It most definitely does *not* say that he that is not elect is condemned already; he is, but that is because he is unbelieving. Condemnation is not a question of election; it is a question of believing or not believing. The elect, even the elect, before believing are under the wrath of God.

How could Gill make such a bad mistake on this point – Ephesians 2:1-3, in particular? And what defence did he put up for his assertion? The answer is, he got out of one problem only by

¹⁴ As with justification, there is more than one aspect to condemnation. The ungodly are condemned in God’s decree; they are under his wrath even as they live now; and, if they die in an unbelieving state, they will be eternally condemned following the last judgement. The elect, of course, although before their conversion they were under the wrath of God, upon believing and being justified, they are for ever beyond condemnation, clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:1,33-34).

plunging himself deeper into another; that is to say, he compounded his mistake, in that he evaded the consequences of Ephesians 2:1-3 only by making a nonsense of Paul's teaching on Adam and Christ. I said I would return to this vital matter. I do so now.

In Adam or in Christ?

Adam and Christ are the two heads of the human race. All men are under either Adam or Christ as their head. They are either 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22). They cannot be in both at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive. But Gill denied this by asserting that the elect, having two natures, Adamic and Christian, are in both Adam and Christ *at one and the same time*. In their Adamic nature, the elect are under the wrath of God, but in their Christian nature, they are justified. They are in these two – in Adam and in Christ – not only from eternity, but in time – both before conversion and after, their Adamic nature and condition being exterminated only at physical death. The elect, Gill declared, 'were under a sentence of condemnation, as considered in Adam... but as considered in Christ, as the elect of God always were... they were never in a state of condemnation'.¹⁵ In other words, the elect are condemned in Adam and justified in Christ – at one and the same time, both before conversion and after!¹⁶

Really?

First, a word or two on this 'two natures' business. This notion is, I admit, exceedingly popular among evangelicals, most of whom would run a mile at the thought of being accused of Calvinistic tendencies, let alone being a hyper-Calvinist! Popular, as the 'two-nature teaching' may be, however, it does not stop it being a serious mistake. Only one person ever had two natures – Christ. Christ was and is both God and man. God, angels, men all have but one nature. Christ alone has two natures. That is the end of it!

¹⁵ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p55.

¹⁶ Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp107-109,178-179. See Berkouwer p152. See the Introduction and the Extracts for contemporary hyper-Calvinists who part company with Gill to say that the elect were condemned, not in Adam, but in Christ. The elect are both condemned and justified *in Christ*?!? Leaving the '?!?' to sum up my view of this, I will concentrate on Gill's position.

While what I now say does not apply to all who think in terms of the ‘two natures’, one of the grievous consequences of the ‘two-nature teaching’ (coupled with a mis-reading of Rom. 7:14-25), is the seeming support it gives to those believers who want to relegate all their carnal ways to their so-called sinful nature – for which they are not responsible. This Adamic waste-paper basket has proved a handy depository for all the ‘inconveniences’ arising out of scriptural commands to holiness and rebukes for sin. It allows such people to live as carnally as they like, and yet cast all the responsibility and consequences upon Adam and their sinful nature. A satanic master-stroke. The rigmarole is an utter nonsense from beginning to end.¹⁷

The ‘two nature’ doctrine usually takes the form of saying that the two natures in believers correspond to the old and the new man. Now the concept of the old and new man is, of course, thoroughly biblical (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10; see also 2 Cor. 5:17). But the ‘old man’ and the ‘new man’ do not stand for two natures. Not at all! They stand for two statuses. The ‘old man’ is what the elect sinner was before he came to faith; he was ‘in Adam’; that *was* his standing before God. The ‘new man’ is what the elect sinner is after coming to faith; he is ‘in Christ’; that *is* his standing before God.¹⁸

We are talking about what we may term ‘federal headship’, ‘representative headship’. In Scripture, it is clear that God deals with mankind under two ‘heads’ or ‘representatives’, Adam and Christ. We have no choice in this. God deals with men under one or other of these two heads. These two men – in his disobedience, Adam; and, in his obedience, Christ – were not acting merely as private persons. As public persons, what they did was imputed to all for whom they stood, imputed to all they represented. Adam fell; so did all ‘in Adam’ – that is, all men. Christ pleased his Father

¹⁷ In the USA, so I understand, it is not unknown for some professing believers to misunderstand or misapply 1 Cor. 3:1-4 by making a virtue out of what the apostle saw as an offence – ‘the carnal Christian’. Paul was rebuking the Corinthians, of course, not commending them; he was not tolerating their carnality! Heb. 12:14 must never be forgotten. Sanctification, in the progressive sense, is essential.

¹⁸ See Lloyd-Jones: *New*.

The Principles

absolutely; so did all ‘in Christ’ – that is, all the elect. It is not for us to question this. God has revealed it. This is the way in which he deals with all mankind.¹⁹

When we read of Adam and Christ, we are not reading of two *natures*. They are the two *persons*, two *heads* of the human race. All men are either in Adam or in Christ. Adam is my head; or Christ is. The old man is what the believer was in Adam. The new man is what he is in Christ. If I am a believer, my old man is what I was in Adam, before my conversion, and my new man is what I am now in Christ. When I passed from death (in)to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14), I passed from being ‘in Adam’ to being ‘in Christ’.²⁰ No man can be under two heads at one and the same time. He must be, he can be, under only one head at any given time. No man can be in two mutually exclusive states at one and the same time. Romans 5:12-21 makes it clear. All men, including the elect, by nature are born ‘in Adam’. Believers are ‘in Christ’.

As I showed earlier, when commenting on Romans 8:1, Gill critically missed the glorious overtones of the eschatological argument in Romans 3:21 – 8:4, punctuated, as it is, by Paul’s use of ‘now’ or ‘but now’ (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; plus Rom. 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10).²¹ These words, ‘but now’, should be read as though they were pulsating in neon. Gill missed this, badly. And he was making precisely the same mistake here, when thinking of ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’. He failed to see that the apostle is speaking of two realms, two reigns – namely, the reign and realm of Adam, flesh, sin, law and death; and the reign and realm of Christ, the Spirit, spirit, holiness, grace and life. Men

¹⁹ Incidentally, this is why it is essential to maintain the biblical account of Adam in Genesis. If the early chapters of Genesis fall, so do Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15. And if they fall, so does all the rest.

²⁰ Take John 5:24. ‘He who... believes... has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life’. Clearly, he who does not believe – or who has not yet believed – is spiritually dead and heading for judgement because he is, as yet, under God’s wrath. See John 5:24-29.

²¹ 1 Pet. 2:10 does not have the ‘now’ but it is clearly implied.

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

who are in Adam are in one epoch or age or realm. Men who are in Christ are in a totally different epoch or age or realm:

For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive... The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:21-22,47-49).

I have said much more about this in my *Christ is All*. To fail to give this biblical principle its due weight is tragic. The believer, before coming to faith, as all the unregenerate, was 'in Adam'. Now, after coming to faith, he is 'in Christ'. In Adam, he was condemned under God's wrath. In Christ – now – he is justified, clothed in Christ's righteousness.

In short: Until a sinner believes, he is in Adam, dead in sins (Rom. 5:6; Eph. 2:1,5), does not have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), but is under the wrath of God (John 3:18,36; Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:6-7), in darkness (Eph. 5:8), in the flesh (Rom. 8:4-9; Eph. 2:3), alienated from God and an enemy to him (Rom. 5:10; 8:7; Col. 1:21), regards spiritual things as foolish (1 Cor. 2:11-14) and hateful (Rom. 8:7), is not saved (Acts 16:31), does not have the righteousness of Christ imputed to him (Rom. 4:3,5,11,24), is not justified (Rom. 3:22-30; 5:1; 8:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:8,24), is condemned of God – not having received Christ's propitiation (Rom. 3:25). And so on (see Rom. 1:18 – 3:23, in particular). In other words, until a sinner believes, even though he may be elect, he is in Adam, and bears all the consequences that go with such a status before God. The unbelieving sinner is all this. The unbeliever, I repeat. Not the unbeliever as in Adam, not the unbeliever in his fallen nature. The unbeliever, full stop! The unbeliever – every unbeliever, including the elect!

Yet Gill, as Naylor summarised it, 'taught that before conversion [the] elect... were simultaneously in both a state of condemnation and a state of justification'.²² Incredible! But it gets worse. Let me explain.

²² Naylor p179.

Let us remember what we are talking about. We are dealing with a sinner before conversion. How should we regard him? This is a question of the utmost importance. Imagine a surgeon, lancet in hand, not knowing what was wrong with the patient lying anaesthetised before him! Well, then, imagine a believer trying to address an unbeliever, not knowing what is really wrong with the person before him!

The sinner before conversion: How should we regard him? He may be elect. He may not. We have no way of telling. In any event, with regard to the way we proceed, it is irrelevant whether or not this unbeliever is elect (which, in any case, we cannot possibly know). He is a sinner. That is his status. According to Scripture, he is ‘in Adam’ with *all* that *that* entails. He desperately needs to be brought out of Adam and brought into Christ. So speaks the Bible.

Not so for the hyper-Calvinist. When the hyper-Calvinist is faced with an unbeliever whom he claims he can recognise as what he calls a sensible sinner, he is convinced that this sinner is elect. This means that the sinner in question is both ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’. But, at this point, for reasons of his own (reasons which I am unaware of), the hyper-Calvinist *conveniently drops the ‘in Adam’ bit*. He concentrates on the ‘in Christ’. The thing that matters above all else to him is that this sensible sinner is elect, he is ‘in Christ’, and has been so from eternity, and, therefore, as such, has never been under the wrath of God, never condemned. He is certainly not under the wrath of God at this moment – even though, as yet, he has not come to faith. Let me repeat the earlier extract from Gill: ‘The elect... never were in a state of condemnation’.²³ It gets even worse. As I have mentioned, and as I will fully demonstrate when I produce the Case Study I have spoken of, some hyper-Calvinists go as far as to call sensible (though unbelieving) sinners ‘safe’ and ‘blessed’. They preach that way, and denounce all who tell unbelievers that they must flee to Christ, and command them to do so at once – because, until they do, they remain under the wrath of God.

Well, that’s plain enough. But plainly wrong. According to Scripture, sinners, before coming to faith, are ‘in Adam’,

²³ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p55.

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

condemned under the wrath of God. They are anything but ‘safe’ and ‘blessed’. And this includes the elect.

An objection

How is it possible to reconcile the fact that, before faith, the elect are under the wrath of God, with the fact that God loves his elect with an everlasting love? If God loves his elect from before the foundation of the world, and in his love decreed to give his Son as a sacrifice for their redemption, how can it be said that they are under his wrath before they believe? After all, God loved his elect when he gave Christ to die for them (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-11).²⁴ So... how can the elect be under the wrath of God before they believe, if God regenerates them because he loves them (Eph. 2:4-5; 1 John 3:1; 4:9)? And so on (Rom. 8:37; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13-17; 1 John 3:16; 4:19; Rev. 1:5). How can we reconcile these two truths? That is, how can we come to terms with the fact that God everlastingly loves his elect – from eternity to eternity – and yet, before they come to faith, the elect are condemned under his wrath, condemned as much as any man? How can we square this circle?

We can’t.

Here, once again, we meet another of those ‘seeming contradictions’. And, as usual, we could adopt the ploy of denying or ignoring one of the strands – or, like Gill, invent the unbiblical nonsense of the elect being in Adam and in Christ at one and the same time. But this is not the way to go on.

What is the right way?

First, we must do what we can, in accordance with the whole of Scripture, to reconcile the two parts of the seeming contradiction. But even so, in this life, we will never be able to get logical consistency within a closed theological system. Calvin tried, but as I show in the Extracts, even he failed. Of course he did.

There it is. We are up against a seeming contradiction which we cannot resolve. But both parts are plainly revealed in Scripture.

²⁴ Indeed, God so loved the world that he gave his Son (John 3:16). This raises other questions which I have dealt with elsewhere. See my *Offer; Particular; Septimus*. But it not only raises questions. It speaks the most wonderful truth imaginable!

The Principles

How can both parts be true? How could God hate the elect and yet love them with an everlasting love? The answer is the same as always: we must hold both parts in tension. It does not make God a schizophrenic. It is simply that, in his grace and condescension, he has accommodated himself and his unfathomable truth to our poor, limited understanding. By stating the two truths, giving equal prominence to each, we get a rounded picture of God, and the reality of the case in question. Naturally, as a consequence, we are left with an unresolved paradox.

And that is the end of the matter. What I have said will not satisfy the hyper-Calvinist. That goes without saying. But I have one answer: ‘Who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘(Rom. 9:20, NIV). I stand with Isaac Watts:

*How well thy blessed truths agree!
How wise and holy thy commands!
Thy promises, how firm they be!
How firm our hope and comfort stands!*

*Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treach'rous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.²⁵*

And again:

*Almighty God! to thee
Be endless honours done,
The undivided Three,
And the Eternal²⁶ One:
Where reason fails, with all her powers,
There faith prevails
And love adores.²⁷*

If I may be allowed to take some words of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on another matter and apply them to the case in hand:

²⁵ *Gospel Hymns* number 400.

²⁶ Some versions have ‘mysterious’; ‘inscrutable’ would have done nicely – but it wouldn’t scan.

²⁷ *Gospel Hymns* number 932.

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

If you object to the idea, you are objecting to the Scriptures, you are setting up some philosophic idea of your own, contrary to their plain teaching. You are not arguing with me; you are arguing with the Scriptures. You are arguing with these... apostles; you are arguing with the Son of God himself. If you believe the Bible is divinely inspired, then you must not say: 'But I don't understand'. You are not asked to understand. I [myself] do not understand it; I do not pretend to understand it. But I start from this basis, that my mind is not only finite but is, furthermore, sinful, and that I cannot understand fully the nature of God and the justice and the holiness of God. If we are going to base everything on our understanding, then we might as well give up at this point... The business of preaching is not to ask people to understand; the commission of the preacher is to proclaim the message.²⁸

I agree. Not only do I not understand these paradoxes, but nor, as I often tell my hearers when preaching, and now tell you, reader, do I set myself up as the explainer of all mysteries, the resolver of all conundrums. I 'merely' try to preach and write what I see in Scripture. I do my best to copy the biblical pattern of preaching, leaving the reconciliation of all logical consequences to God.

Paul certainly had no qualms about stating both sides of this particular paradox – and doing so in the closest proximity:

And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Eph. 2:1-3).

That's the first part of the paradox. The elect, before conversion, are under the wrath of God. Having stated it as bluntly as he did, the apostle goes straight on – without a gap, I stress – to the second part:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... (Eph. 2:4-6).

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones: *God's* pp53-54.

The Principles

God has loved his elect with an everlasting love, and because of that love, he calls them to Christ. That is the second part of the paradox.

And the apostle states both parts with equal force, making not the slightest effort to reconcile them, and so leave everything neatly sewn up. Not at all! Now, what is good enough for Paul – I intend no disrespect, nor am I trying to be clever – is good enough for me. There is nothing more I can say, and so I will say no more, but leave the objection there, and move on.

Taking up the thread again: Consider Romans 4:5 and 5:6

Let me remind you, reader, that I am arguing that, before faith, the elect are ungodly, and therefore as much under the wrath of God as any sinner. It is only as they come to saving faith that they are actually delivered from condemnation and justified.

Consider Paul's statements: Speaking of the elect, God 'justifies the ungodly' (Rom. 4:5), and 'Christ died for the ungodly' (Rom. 5:6). God justifies the elect in and through Christ's death when they are ungodly. The question is: are we talking about justification in God's decree and Christ's death, or are we talking about actual justification by faith? We must be careful to distinguish the two. Take Gill. He started right:

That God's elect are, by nature, ungodly, will not be denied; as such, Christ died for them (Rom. 5:6)... And it is as evident, that, as such, God justifies them (Rom. 4:5)... He justifies them being ungodly.

Sadly, Gill then drew a red herring across the path. He did this, of course, because he was preparing his readers for the punch line he had in mind. In itself, the initial point he made was right, and one with which I whole-heartedly agree; namely, that a believer cannot be called – and, in Scripture, is never called – ungodly. I agree. In fact, I would turn it back upon Gill. No believer *is* ungodly – he is no longer in Adam! But before he came to faith, he *was* ungodly, being in Adam! Nevertheless, let Gill's words stand. No believer is ever called ungodly. Just so.

But Gill's observation was a red herring, one which enabled him to make a foolish deduction: 'I conclude then, that if God

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

justifies his elect when they are ungodly, then he justifies them before they believe'.²⁹ This, of course, was his punch line.

Let me tease out his argument. Believers are never called 'ungodly' in Scripture. God justified the ungodly (elect) when Christ died for them. The elect, therefore, were justified as ungodly; that is, before they were believers. Hence they were justified in eternity and at Christ's death. In other words, eternal justification. *Q.E.D.*

Not at all! In eternity, God decreed the justification of the elect through the work of Christ. But until they come to faith, the elect are still in Adam, still ungodly. It is as they come to faith and are united to Christ, that they are actually justified, and are no longer to be thought of as ungodly. That is precisely what Paul is speaking about in Romans 4:5. He is not talking about justification in terms of God's decree and Christ's work. He is talking about actual justification by faith! In the context, Paul is arguing that God justifies his elect without their works:

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God... Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works (Rom. 4:2-6).

As the apostle goes on, justification is not by our works – not by circumcision (Rom. 4:9-12) or by law (Rom. 4:13-16). We are not justified by our works, but by faith: 'Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand' (Rom. 5:1-2). This is the context, and it is invincible in getting to the correct meaning of the verse in question. Their works contribute nothing to the elect's justification. They have to believe in order to be justified, yes, but their faith is not the cause or ground of their justification. If it were, then faith would be a work, and the elect would be justified by their works. Paul, making the point that the elect are saved without their works, stresses it by observing that

²⁹ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p200; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,142.

The Principles

they are justified when ungodly – so how could they contribute to their justification?³⁰

Before they come to faith, the elect are ungodly in two senses, of course. They are ungodly in God's sight – in that they are in Adam; that is, they are ungodly in their status. In addition, they are ungodly in their actual behaviour. Upon coming to faith, however, they are united to Christ, justified, accounted godly in God's sight; that is, they are no longer in Adam but in Christ. In addition, they then begin to live (as a consequence of their conversion experience) a godly life. But the apostle's overriding point in Romans 4 is that God justifies – *actually* justifies – the ungodly, those who are under his wrath (John 3:36; Eph. 2:3), and he does so as they believe, without their works. Of course, when Christ died for the elect according to his Father's decree, they were ungodly (Rom. 5:6) in that they were in Adam – even though most of them had not yet been born! But in Romans 4 Paul is arguing that the elect are actually justified when they believe – that as they believe God imputes Christ's righteousness to them. And this without their works.

Gill conflated Romans 4:5 and 5:6, compounding two aspects of justification – actual and eternal – and thus denied the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. He was arguing that the elect are always justified. When they come to faith, they are no more justified than before – it is simply that they now realise they have always been justified. *That* is what Gill wanted to maintain. And he was wrong!

To sum up: While there is an aspect of justification which 'dates' from eternity through union with Christ, until the sinner comes to saving faith he is not as yet actually united to Christ, he is not as yet actually justified, but is under the wrath of God. He needs to be justified. He can only be justified by trusting Christ. This faith is not the cause of his justification, but it is its means. All this, the Scriptures plainly teach.

³⁰ See Lloyd-Jones: *Atonement* pp171-173. Hyper-Calvinists are not alone in getting Rom. 4:5 wrong. Sandemanians do.

Why such fuss? Why am I making such a song and dance about it? Does it matter? Is the quarrel with the hyper-Calvinistic notion that an elect sinner is justified in eternity a storm in a theological teacup? Certainly not! The issues at stake are vital. Is it *that* important? It certainly is. Why? First and foremost, it is unscriptural. Enough said! Nevertheless, as is my wont, I will say more!

The doctrine of eternal justification matters because of the immense effect it has upon the way we regard unbelievers. More particularly, it matters a great deal because of the bearing it has upon our addresses to the unconverted – what we tell them, and how we tell them – and upon their response to such addresses. And, needless to say, before we come to preach to others, it matters to us in our own experience. What is saving faith? – a question, not only for the sinners we address, but for ourselves. Who or what are we believing when we come to saving faith? and why? and what for? The fact is, eternal justification has a ruinous effect on the concept of conversion. Let me explain.

Eternal justification and conversion

How we view justification will have a very serious effect on our view of conversion. If we move away from the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, one of the inevitable casualties will be the doctrine of conversion. In previous works, I traced this out among Reformed infant-baptisers, Baptist sacramentalists, Exclusive Brethren, and promoters of the New Perspective, as well as, it goes without saying, Romanists.³¹ Now I do the same for hyper-Calvinists with their doctrine of eternal justification.

Whenever the doctrine of justification is tampered with, certain things inevitably follow. The church (or Church) becomes more important than salvation; ‘belonging’ becomes more important than ‘believing’; and the biblical doctrine of conversion is degraded.

Conversion: putting it simply, according to Scripture, conversion involves a change in both status and condition. As for status, before conversion, the sinner was in Adam. He is now in Christ. And this change of status leads inevitably to a change of life (Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). The sinner is regenerated by the

³¹ See my *Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism; Conversion*.

The Principles

Holy Spirit, convicted of his sin, and in repentance turns from his sin, and turns to Christ, trusting him for salvation. This experience gives the sinner a new attitude, mind, will, heart, desire, and so on, producing a corresponding change of life. Obviously so. Regeneration is renewal, re-birth. It can be nothing less than a momentous change!

Let me make myself clear: I am not saying that the sinner must be able to specify the time and place of his conversion. No! But that he must have such an experience is irrefutable. What is more, in his course of life, he must give clear evidence of such a change. No one is born a believer. No one is born into the faith (John 1:13). Faith is not an evidence of belonging to the people of God;³² it is the way of becoming one of the people of God. And by that I do not mean ‘attend a place of worship’! I mean become a child of God! So, to become a child of God, one has to believe. And in order to be able to believe, one must be regenerated. To see the kingdom, to enter the kingdom, the sinner, every sinner without exception, must be born again (John 3:3-8).³³ This inward regenerating work of the Spirit is sovereign and secret, but its effects are open and clear (John 3:3-8). There comes a time when unbelief is changed to faith, when the broad road is forsaken and the narrow way taken. There is a burning of the boats. Conversion is a ‘crisis’, a crux, a turning point, a change, not a gradual process. Sinners do not drift into the kingdom. They do not coast out of the realm of darkness, and glide seamlessly into the kingdom of light. They do not ‘go with the flow’. Rather, they are radically, vigorously, abruptly ‘delivered’ from the kingdom of darkness and ‘translated’ (AV), ‘conveyed, transferred’ (NKJV, NASB) into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). It does not happen by a kind of spiritual osmosis.³⁴ The words the

³² As I have shown, Gill taught that ‘faith is the... evidence of our justification’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p213). For hyper-Calvinistic use of Heb. 11:1, see later. Of course, only the elect will believe (John 8:47; 10:26-27), but faith is the means whereby a sinner comes to belong to the people of God; the believer’s subsequent works are the evidence of it. In this matter, the hyper-Calvinist and the advocate of the New Perspective draw close together – see my *Conversion*.

³³ Contrary to what many believe, this cannot be accomplished by water.

³⁴ A subtle or gradual absorption or mingling.

apostle used – ‘deliver’, *rhuomai*, and ‘translate’, *methistēmi* – speak of power and change, alteration. Note the *met(a)*, which speaks of change. Other New Testament uses of *methistēmi* confirm the point. The steward was ‘put out’ of his job; Saul was ‘removed’ from the throne; Demetrius complained that Paul had ‘turned away’ many from idolatry; the mountains were ‘removed’ (Luke 16:4; Acts 13:22; 19:26; 1 Cor. 13:2).

Thus conversion is a ‘crisis’. Hoping yet again not to be misunderstood, I assert that conversion is ‘dramatic’. A man does not get the sack, a king does not lose his throne, idolaters do not destroy their idols, mountains do not collapse, and so on, in a genteel sort of unknowing haze. Nor does a sinner get converted in such a way. Moreover, once he has been converted, the sinner is never the same again (2 Cor. 5:17). When a man gets the sack, when a king is de-throned, when idolaters give up their idols, openly confessing their sins, burning their magic books in a public bonfire (Acts 19:18-20), to worship only the one true God, when mountains suddenly disappear, nobody is left in any doubt about it. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, while it undoubtedly has extraordinary elements about it, nevertheless affords us a clear illustration of the principles involved (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-29; Gal. 1:3-24; Phil. 3:2-21; 1 Tim. 1:12-17).³⁵

Again, hoping not to be misunderstood, conversion is a ‘before-and-after event’. Paul’s conversion was a hot topic of relieved and thankful talk among the churches (Gal. 1:23-24); and the Jews certainly didn’t miss it – they wanted to kill him (Acts 9:23)! While I am not demanding *that* kind of reaction, change and reaction there must be! In a very real sense, every convert ought to provoke a response similar to that of the Jewish bigwigs who were trying to put a stop to the gospel: ‘When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus’ (Acts 4:13, NIV). Unbelievers, when they witness the new life of a convert compared to his past (1 Pet. 4:1-4), or the way believers (including – perhaps especially – new converts) stand up to persecution for the sake of Christ (Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:27-30; 1

³⁵ For more, see, for instance, Berkhof pp480-492.

The Principles

Thess. 2:13-16; 3:1-5; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Heb. 10:32-34), might well be moved to raise questions along the lines of 1 Peter 3:15.

Then again, Jesus' miracles illustrate the gospel, do they not? Well then, take just one – the healing of the man with the legion of devils (Mark 5:1-20). The change in him was evident to all, even before he spoke of it – which he did. He certainly had a 'before and after', and nobody was in any doubt about it.

Consider Ephesians 4:20 – 6:9 (NIV). Believers, all of whom were once 'dead in transgressions and sins', living ungodly lives (Eph. 2:1-3), have come to 'know Christ' through the gospel. In renewing them, the Spirit of God has changed them, brought them to faith, and 'taught' them to live in a godly way. So radical is this experience, a definite, clear, root-and-branch change in their lifestyle is inevitable. They are converted! They are indeed a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV). The apostle could not have made the significance of this 'crisis', this conversion, this consequential change, any clearer. Note the contrasts he draws in Ephesians 4 – 6: 'former way of life', 'old self', 'made new', 'new self', 'no longer', 'you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord'. And those are only the 'obvious' ways in which the apostle makes his point; the entire passage is packed with allusions to this change, this conversion. And it all stems from the sinner coming to know Christ through faith, and being justified. Before conversion, the sinner was dead in sins, and all that goes with that. By God's grace, he is now regenerated and has come to trust the Redeemer, and so is accounted and made righteous in God's sight. As a consequence, he now begins to live a holy life to the glory of God (Eph. 2:1-10). This is what I mean by 'conversion'.

There is no clearer example of what I am talking about than the apostle's description of the conversion of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:5-10):

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith towards God has gone out [everywhere, NIV],

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Where do hyper-Calvinists go astray in this matter? Let me make my point by stressing the ‘faith’ and the ‘change’. As I have shown, and will yet show more fully, hyper-Calvinists *radically* alter the nature of justifying faith. Inevitably, therefore, they correspondingly alter the nature of conversion. What is more, because they hold to eternal justification, for hyper-Calvinists, when the elect sinner is regenerated and comes to faith, they expect no ‘change’, there is no ‘change’. Gill was explicit! The sinner is no more ‘in Christ’, no more ‘justified’, than he was before he came to faith.³⁶ It is simply that he now knows that he is and always has been justified. He never was in Adam.³⁷ He has always been in Christ. There is no change of status, no change of realm or kingdom.

The Bible is against them! In both these elements – the faith and the change – hyper-Calvinists are wrong, and therefore, I maintain, their doctrine has ruined the biblical concept of ‘conversion’.³⁸ *And this has had a devastating effect on those gripped by it.*

In my experience of hyper-Calvinists, let me describe how it appears to me. Such people faithfully attend chapel, sit under the preaching, and so on, for years, if not decades, privately and publicly reading the Bible, believing the Bible, singing the hymns, praying, seeking to live according to the Bible... But if asked if they are saved, at best they can only say they hope so. Or as a deacon, many years ago, replied to me when I asked if his boss at the mill was a Christian: ‘That’s a big question’. They are waiting – waiting for the ‘manifestation’, the confirmation that they are elect, redeemed and justified. They may even die in such a waiting, hoping state. But... perhaps... one day the long-awaited assurance

³⁶ Gill: *Body* Vol.1 p299. I will look at this more closely.

³⁷ See above, where I dealt with the nuances of the hyper-Calvinistic view of being ‘in Adam’.

³⁸ The Gospel Standard Articles of Faith do not even mention conversion. See the Extracts for the nearest they get to it.

The Principles

comes, and they are given the manifestation. What now? They now continue faithfully to attend chapel, sit under the preaching, and so on, privately and publicly reading the Bible, believing the Bible, singing the hymns, praying, seeking to live according to the Bible... But if asked if they are saved, at best they can only say they hope so...

I believe I am being fair in what I have just written. Let me say at once, I myself think that many of these dear people do have a saving trust in Jesus, despite their creed, and are godly to a high degree. But *prima facie*, there has been no conversion, NOTHING HAS CHANGED – except perhaps, instead of hopefully waiting, they are waiting in hope – or *vice-versa*. In the wrong sense they can sing: ‘For nothing changes here’. And if they believe the doctrine they are taught, they are convinced that they are no more justified now that they have had the manifestation than they were before they had it. Nothing can change; nothing should change. As far as such people are concerned, the concept of ‘conversion’ might never be in the Bible. And this, it surely goes without saying, is exceedingly serious.

I readily admit that Gill, for instance, did set out the biblical doctrine of conversion. In the Extracts, I let him speak for himself. But – and there is a ‘but’ – as can be seen from what we have discovered throughout this chapter, for the hyper-Calvinist, coming to faith means coming to realise that I have always been justified and have always been in Christ. The biblical doctrine – that I need to be awakened to the fact that I am a sinner, that I am under the wrath of God, that only Christ can save me, and that in repentance I turn from my sin to him, and look to him, trusting him to wash me in his blood and clothe me in his righteousness to justify me, and thus present me faultless before his Father – is lost. To put it mildly, this is serious beyond words. This is the consequence of eternal justification.

In particular, if it is true that the elect unbeliever is in Christ and justified, then, anticipating the aforementioned Case Study, John Gadsby was right and Septimus Sears was wrong; the unbelieving sensible sinner is ‘safe’. But that has turned the New Testament on its head! According to Scripture, until sinners believe, they are not ‘safe’ – and it is quite wrong to tell them they are. I go further. I

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

must put it in blunt terms. Telling the unbeliever that he is ‘safe’, is nothing less than diabolical. The opposite is the truth! All unbelievers are under the wrath of God. And they must be told they are, in unmistakeable terms. True, the elect are justified in God’s decree from eternity, but the point at issue here is not *God’s decree*; rather, it is the *sinner’s experience*. Remember my subtitle: ‘Gospel Preaching to Sinners Marred by Hyper-Calvinism’. We are talking about addresses to sinners, to unbelievers – not to the elect before they come to faith!

With that in mind, let us now look a little more closely into what Scripture means by justifying or saving faith. What *is* going on when a sinner believes? What is he believing for? In what way does he believe? Just to parrot ‘believe... believe...’, and not to spell out what we mean by ‘believe’ is worse than useless. So let’s roll up our sleeves, get down to it.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith... to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus... A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law... God... will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith

Romans 3:21-30

What Is Justifying Faith?

Justifying (or saving) faith is the act of a sinner, from his heart, resting his soul upon Christ and his finished work, and thus receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ.¹ By my use of ‘act’, I do not imply that the sinner can exercise saving faith by his own power or will. Not at all. As Jesus said: ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father’ (John 6:44,65). Man is naturally unwilling, resentful, even hating God, regarding spiritual things as foolish (Rom. 1:18 – 3:23; 5:10; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:11-14; Col. 1:21). He has no power to believe: he is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13). As for Christ, the natural man, in essence, has but one response: ‘We will not have this man to reign over us’ (Luke 19:14). ‘You were not willing’, ‘you are not willing’, is the constant complaint of the Saviour to sinners (Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). Even so, the unbeliever has to believe. Moreover, *he* believes; not God. As Gill put it: ‘It is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes’. ‘Faith... as a principle, is purely God’s work; [but] as it is an act, or as it is exercised under the influence of divine grace, it is man’s act’. ‘Faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of *his* faith, and *my* faith, and *your* faith, in Scripture’. Thus said Gill,² and rightly so.

And this believing has three parts. *First*, there is knowledge, a knowledge of certain facts – the gospel (2 Tim. 3:15). *Then*, there must be mental assent – agreement with those facts. And, *thirdly*, this must lead to trust.

Saving faith is believing with the heart. Above all, it is heart-trust in and on Christ, not mere facts – however glorious those facts may be. It is a trust of Christ, his person and work, a leaning upon him, a reliance upon him, a calling upon him, a coming to Christ, a believing ‘on’ him, not merely ‘about’ him (Matt. 11:28; John

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p205.

² Gill: *Cause* p112; *Commentary* Vol.5 p654; *Sermons* Vol.4 p185, emphasis his.

The Principles

6:35,40,44-45,51-56; Rom. 6:17; 10:8-13; Heb. 6:12-19; 1 Pet. 1:21; and so on). As a sinner so comes to Christ, he is justified.

Let me stress the vital point once more. Justifying faith is resting oneself from the heart upon Christ. Not doctrine. Not feelings. Not an experience. Not church. No rite or ceremony. Christ. Christ only and Christ completely. A man who so trusts Christ will never be disappointed, never be confounded, never be put to shame (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6).

And, as we have seen, even though, in eternity, God has decreed the salvation of his elect, and given them to Christ, and, at the appointed time, Christ died and rose again for them, the elect – as much as the non-elect – are born in Adam into this world, and live out their ungodly lives under the wrath of God until they actually come to faith, and so receive the justification which God decreed and Christ accomplished for them. It is in the act of believing, and through that act of believing (all by the power and grace of the sovereign Holy Spirit, and only by that power and grace), that the elect sinner is actually united to Christ and thus justified. Let me put this in the negative. Until the sinner believes, he is not actually justified.

Why is faith such an appropriate – indeed, the only – means of justification? Well, for a start (and finish), it is the means of salvation because God has said it is:

By [Christ] everyone who believes is justified (Acts 13:39). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe... that [God] might be... the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus... A man is justified by faith (Rom. 3:22,26,28). If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart... you will be saved... ‘Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved’. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? (Rom. 10:9,13-14). A man... is... justified... by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). For by grace you have been saved though faith (Eph. 2:8).

And that’s just a sample. God has said it – faith is the means of justification. Faith is the only way in which a man can or will receive his justification.

We may take this question of faith further. Saving faith is *not* the persuasion that Christ died for me. Not at all! I exercise saving

What Is Justifying Faith

faith when I cast my soul upon Christ to save me. Let me say it again. We must get it right! A sinner is not justified by believing or being convinced that Christ died for him, or that he is elect. He is justified only by trusting Christ to justify him. Trust! And before he so trusts Christ he is under God's condemnation and wrath. In saying this, I am not quibbling. It is only as he trusts Christ that he is actually free of condemnation.

Saving faith is not believing the facts of the gospel. It is not believing that I am elect. It is not believing that Christ died for me. It is not looking for a manifestation in my conscience that I am already justified, having been so from eternity. Rather, it is a fleeing to Christ for deliverance. 'We... have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us... even Jesus'. Hebrews 6:18-20 is, of course, based on Joshua 20, the six cities of refuge for the Israelites. In those days, it was all well and good for an Israelite, who was in dire trouble, in fear of his life, to know he would be safe in one of the cities. He might know the way to get there. He might be able to describe all the benefits of being there. *But he was only safe if he got there in time.* He had to flee for his life and get to the place of safety. Above all, *he had to get **into** the city of refuge.* Thus it is with the sinner under the gospel. He must flee to Christ. Until he does so flee, he is anything but safe. He may believe the gospel from A to Z. He may enjoy preaching. He may enjoy discussing its finer points. He may be persuaded that he is elect. But until he trusts Christ, he is under the wrath of God.

The gospel bids us 'turn'. We have to turn. The gospel bids us 'repent'. We have to repent. The gospel bids us 'believe'. We have to believe. The gospel bids us 'come'. We have to come. The gospel bids us 'call'. We have to call. The gospel bids us 'receive'. We have to receive. Until we turn, repent, believe, come, call, receive, we are not justified. But if we do so close with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are, in that very instant, united to him and justified.

Nothing could be of greater importance for the unbeliever, therefore, than that he should trust the Saviour at once. Whatever else he has, whatever he has done, whatever experience of feelings he may claim for himself, unless he trusts Christ he will perish. Delay is not an option!

The Principles

C.H.Spurgeon drew a lesson from the tragic sinking of the ‘Eurydice’ in 1878:

On March 24th [1878]... her Majesty’s training ship ‘Eurydice’, which had returned from a cruise to the West Indies, was rounding Dunnose headland, off the Isle of Wight, with all plain sails and also her studding sails set. Those on board were all naturally anxious to reach their homes, and having only to round the coast and to anchor off Spithead, they were making the best of the wind. The noble frigate was plainly seen from the lovely village of Shanklin; but one who was watching the fine vessel suddenly missed it; and wondered why. She was hastening along with all sails set, except her royals, and her ports open, when in a moment the fierce wind pounced upon her. It was in vain that the captain ordered sail to be shortened; the ship lurched till her keel was visible, and, in less time than it takes us to write it, the ship capsized, and more than three hundred brave seamen perished.

Spurgeon drew a valuable application from the catastrophe:

[A] lesson which lies upon the surface of this sad event is this – *never feel perfectly safe till you are in port*. Many awakened souls are almost within the haven of peace, and are at this time rounding the headland of thoughtfulness, with the sails of earnest inquiry all displayed to the breeze. Their condition is very hopeful, but it is not satisfactory to those who are anxious about their eternal welfare, nor should it be satisfactory to themselves. They are steering for the harbour, they enjoy favouring winds, they have all sails set, but still they have not quite believed in Jesus, nor surrendered themselves to his grace. We who watch them can see that their ports are open, and we dread lest they should be overtaken by a sudden temptation and should suddenly be overturned at the very moment when our hopes are at their best.

Spurgeon drove the point home in a direct and personal way:

Is the reader in such a case? Then let us beseech him not to be content till he has found Christ, and so by faith has anchored in the harbour of ‘eternal salvation’. Do not be happy, dear friend, till you are moored to the Rock of Ages, under the lee of the everlasting hills of divine mercy, through the atoning blood. It seems very wonderful that a ship which had been to sea so many times and had just completed a long winter’s cruise in safety should at last go down just off the coast in a place where danger seemed out of the question. It is doubly sad that so many men should be within sight of a shore upon which they must never set their foot. To perish in mid-ocean seems not so hard a lot as to die with the white cliffs of Albion so near: to die with the gospel

What Is Justifying Faith

ringing in our ears is still more sad. Never reckon the ship safe till it floats in the haven: never reckon a soul safe till it is actually 'in Christ'. The 'almost persuaded' are often the last to be fully persuaded. Aroused, impressed, and moved to good resolutions, to tears, and even to prayers, yet men postpone decision, and by the force of Satan's arts are lost – lost when we all hoped to see them saved. O that seekers were wise enough to be distressed until they are thoroughly renewed. Any position short of regeneration is perilous in the extreme. The manslayer would have been cut down by the avenger had he lingered outside the walls of the refuge-city; it would have been all in vain for him to have touched its stones or sheltered near its towers: he must be within the gates or die. Seekers after salvation, you are not safe till you actually close in with Jesus, place all your confidence in him and become for ever his. Shall it be so now, or will you abide in death? Rest not an hour. Trifle not for another moment; for death may seize you, or a spiritual lethargy may come over your soul from which you may never again be aroused. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till your anchor has entered into that within the veil and you are saved in Christ Jesus.³

Hyper-Calvinists will not have it at any price. Having argued for an unbiblical eternal justification, they inevitably come to an unbiblical view of justifying faith.⁴ As a result, in their preaching they aim for the wrong thing – and do it in the wrong way. And here we reach the underlying issue of this consequence of eternal justification. It is time to explore the hyper-Calvinist's mistaken concept of this essential act of justifying faith.

³ Spurgeon: 'Voice' pp9-14.

⁴ As I have said, they are not alone. Sandemanians also have a wrong view of saving faith. I acknowledge that Gill, for instance, was no Sandemanian. He knew that saving faith is more than assent, but includes dependence, trust, confidence, reliance (Gill: *Body* Vol.3 pp48-71; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp73-86). Having said that, some hyper-Calvinistic statements get close to Sandemanianism. See the following chapter. To be fair, this could be said of many Calvinists in general – and Arminians. And I intend to say it in a book on Sandemanianism – in hope of doing something to bring about a change. And a change is necessary. As for incipient hyper-Calvinism and incipient Sandemanianism, 'there's a lot of it about these days'.

They... searched the Scriptures... to find out whether these things were
so

Acts 17:11

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

What do hyper-Calvinists understand by ‘justification by faith’?¹ In particular, what do they think is going on when a sinner exercises justifying faith?²

Before I answer that, let us remind ourselves of some of the ground we have covered. Let us remind ourselves of what Gill said about justification. I summarise here – the extracts may be found at the appropriate places throughout this present work. For Gill, election and justification are, for all practical purposes, one and the same. God has decreed to justify his elect, and that decree, that will, comprises the whole essence of justification. God’s will to justify his elect is their justification. So said Gill.

So what about faith? Where does faith come into the picture? Gill was both consistent and unequivocal: ‘Faith... a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God’.³

In short: God has decreed to justify his elect. The whole essence of their justification is in that will of God. The elect are no more justified after faith than they were before. The inevitable conclusion? Faith is strictly unnecessary! Justification is entirely a matter of God’s will.

Do I hear an objection? ‘Wait a minute! Notice Gill’s “in the account of God”. Gill was not talking about *actual* justification. After all, we know he said this: “I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual”’. So might one of Gill’s hyper-Calvinistic fellow-advocates argue.

Ah! But... take that last extract from Gill, and read on:

I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual; though for no other reason than this, lest any should imagine them as transient acts of God upon the elect, which require their

¹ As I have already remarked, this biblical phrase does not appear in the Gospel Standard Articles. Quite a startling omission, one would think.

² The extracts for this chapter begin on p209.

³ Gill: *Body* Vol.1 p299.

The Principles

personal and actual existence; for otherwise, as I believe, that eternal election is actual, and eternal reprobation is actual, as they are immanent acts in God; so I believe, eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies; and eternal union is actual, as it is an act of God's everlasting love to his elect, whereby he has knit and united them to himself. I go on to ask, where have I said... that a non-entity was united to an existence?... The elect of God, though they have not an... actual being from eternity, yet they have... a representative being in Christ from everlasting.⁴

In short, Gill might carefully avoid using the word 'actual', but as he said, he did it to avoid the objection that if actual, then the sinner had to be in existence. In short, he was digging in, and digging in hard, for eternal justification and, even though he did not use the word for the reason he gave, nevertheless '*actual justification*' is *precisely what he meant*: 'Eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies'. In this, he was fending off the unbiblical notion that justification is the sinner's act. Saving faith is the sinner's act, needless to say – as Gill recognised⁵ – but justification is not. No sinner can justify himself. It is only God who can justify. In that, Gill and I are one. Nevertheless, for all his carefulness, Gill *was* talking about actual justification; God actually justifies the elect in eternity. That is what he was saying.

This is why hyper-Calvinists argue so vehemently against what the New Testament means by 'justification by faith'. They think that actual justification takes place in eternity. As a consequence, if I may paraphrase, they are convinced that we should be talking in terms of 'justification of the predestined by God's decree'. *That*, according to the hyper-Calvinist, is the real justification, actual justification: 'Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification'. So said Gill – in a sermon, please note!⁶ In a sermon, I stress – to a mixed congregation. What conclusion did that congregation draw? What conclusion have Gill's readers drawn since? 'Justification... by... believing, is not properly [actual] justification'? No! Of course not! that is, if you are a hyper-

⁴ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 pp102-103.

⁵ Gill: *Cause* p112; *Commentary* Vol.5 p654; *Sermons* Vol.4 p185.

⁶ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p211.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Calvinist. Actual justification is from eternity; it took place in eternity past. Faith has nothing to do with it.

Hyper-Calvinists are certainly consistent in this. They do not tell their hearers that until they trust Christ they are not justified. They are implacably opposed to duty faith and the free offer. They never call upon anybody to flee to the Saviour for justification. In fact, in their Articles, books and sermons, they repeatedly denounce those who do so call upon sinners. There is only one conclusion: Faith is strictly unnecessary.

No! Let me stop being mealy-mouthed about it. Faith *is* unnecessary, full stop! This is where eternal justification ends up. Crisp: 'It is not believing that justifies... Christ justifies a person before he believes; for he that believes is justified before he believes'.⁷

Bear in mind, reader, however many byzantine⁸ hairs theologians and metaphysicians may split and re-split, however pedantically they may vet their terminology, and whatever steps they may take to couch their words in every subsidiary clause, both conceivable and inconceivable, what really matters is what the people in the pew *think* they are being told. Who bothers with the small print? In any case, who can understand it? Perception! That's the word! It's what the people take away with them. And if they listen to hyper-Calvinistic preachers, if they read hyper-Calvinistic books and magazines, if they visit hyper-Calvinistic websites, they will inevitably come to the conclusion that faith is not necessary in order to be justified.

Something is seriously adrift here. This cannot be right. On this argument, there is never any need for anybody to trust Christ for justification. What is more, it surely follows, nobody will be condemned for their unbelief. I cannot see how these two conclusions can be avoided.⁹ It is entirely a question of God's decree. Let me remind you what Gill declared: 'As I believe [that is, I am convinced], that eternal election is actual, and eternal

⁷ Crisp Vol.1 p91.

⁸ In the sense of 'tortuous, highly complicated', from the culture of the Byzantine Empire.

⁹ I repeat an earlier note. Crisp and Gill never faced up to this dilemma (Daniel pp327-328).

reprobation is actual... so I believe [I am convinced], eternal justification is actual...'.¹⁰ Faith, or the lack of it, does not come into it. As a contemporary hyper-Calvinist website has it: 'We must also understand that our believing or not believing does not make us condemned or not condemned. Our believing or not believing only gives evidence of our being condemned or not condemned'.¹¹

What! Unbelief a mere evidence? How can this be – in light of the following biblical statements?

He who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed... He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:18,36). They did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Unbelief a mere *evidence* of condemnation? Far from it! Unbelief is the *cause* of condemnation!¹²

But there it is. According to hyper-Calvinists, there is never any need for anybody to trust Christ for justification. Similarly, nobody will be condemned for their unbelief. Unbelief is merely an evidence, a symptom of condemnation. It has no causal effect on it. Men are condemned because God has decreed it. He must have created them for this very purpose!

This is of such paramount importance, I really must try to tease it out. If 'the *whole essence* of justification' lies in God's will to justify his elect, then 'the whole essence of *justification*' lies in God's will to *justify* his elect. Further, that must mean that the whole essence of *condemnation* lies in his will to *condemn* the reprobate. And that, in turn, can only mean that every man, woman or child – every person – at birth is either already justified or

¹⁰ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 pp102-103.

¹¹ Taken from Jim Casey: 'Condemnation', Article 949, posted Oct. 2010 at www.rofgrace.com/articles website.

¹² Unbelief is the cause of damnation, but faith is not the cause of justification – that is the sovereign grace of God in his eternal decree. Logic-mongers may scoff at the seeming inconsistency. Let them! Let God's word stand, while logic-choppers fall.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

already condemned, and has been so since from before the creation of the world. Let that sink in. From all eternity, all men are actually justified or condemned, and this by the sovereign will of God.

Now, in God's decree, the fate of all men *is* fixed; in God's decree, I say. There is no quarrel with *that*. But we are talking about things as they are in experience. We must not confuse the secret things and the revealed things of God (Deut. 29:29). The key word is 'actual'. We are concerned here with *actual* justification and *actual* condemnation. According to the hyper-Calvinist, every person, at birth, is either already actually justified or already actually condemned, and has been so since from before the creation of the world. Believing does not come into it.

In other words, we have begun to descend into that dread realm, that grim domain called 'Fatalism', and, having passed through its gloomy portals, we must inevitably drop ever lower into its darkening depths. *Que sera, sera*. Abandon hope, all who enter here! If God has decreed to justify you, and that is the whole essence of justification, all you have to do is... nothing! You are actually justified now, at this very moment! You have always been actually justified. Trust in Christ doesn't come into it. Believing has no bearing whatsoever on your actual justification. The same, of course, goes for those of you who are condemned. If God has decreed to damn you, all you have to do is wait until the day of judgement, and then you will find out what everlasting damnation really means. Your unbelieving has no bearing whatsoever on your actual condemnation. You are actually condemned at this very moment, and have been so from eternity. In short, whoever you are, at this very moment, you are actually justified or actually condemned whether or not you believe. You have nothing to do but wait – wait until it is all made clear to you, either in a manifestation now, or in God's sentence at the day of judgement.

Phew! The result of all this must be either carnal indifference or unmitigated misery.

Not only so. What an utter nonsense it is! Let me illustrate. The day of my death was fixed in eternity in the sovereign will of God. As I write, I have lived 73 years. How much longer I have to live, I cannot possibly say. But it is determined. Now, if I were a fatalist, I would make no effort to preserve my life. But I am not a fatalist.

God gave me a mind, and he gave me opportunities. I have to use both. He expects me to use both. I am accountable to him for my using both, or not using them. In a sense, God's secret timing is none of my business. It is unknowable, and, as a result, plays no part in my attitude to my responsibility to preserve my life. I am of Oliver Cromwell's way of thinking. I have to trust in God *and keep my powder dry*.¹³

Surely, the same applies to the gospel. Of course it does! I have no idea whether the unconverted hearing me, or reading my books, are elect or not. Nor do they! But I must do all I can to get them to believe. And those who hear and read me must make sure that they trust the Saviour. God's secret decree in this affair is none of our business – theirs or mine.

Hyper-Calvinistic fatalism is a nonsense for a further reason. Take those who are supposed to be actually condemned at this moment. We are talking about sinners still alive on earth, are we not? Living (in a natural sense) sinners, we hope(!), are the sort of people we are addressing from the pulpit, the sort of people who are reading our books, the sort of people whom we are engaging in conversation. Very well. They are alive. Now, no sinner, while on earth, is *actually* condemned in the sense of being in hell! He is alive, on earth! This simple stark fact makes a nonsense of the thing from beginning to end. No sinner out of hell is actually condemned.

But it is *justification* I am mainly concerned with here. And as for justification, on the basis of eternal justification, where does faith come into it? As we have seen, the New Testament is for ever talking about justification by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5; for instance). So what is this 'justification by faith'? What do hyper-Calvinists think it is?

Let Gill set out his stall. Although he could rightly say that 'faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified, from the God of its salvation', he immediately added: 'This blessing must exist before faith can receive it'. At first glance, this is right,

¹³ "“Trust in God and keep your powder dry” is a maxim attributed to Oliver Cromwell, but which first appeared in 1834 in the poem “Oliver’s Advice” by William Blacker with the words: “Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry!”” (Wikipedia).

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

needless to say. If God had not decreed to justify the elect, and if Christ had not died and risen again for their justification, there would be no justification for them to receive. Yes. That much is a truism.

But what did Gill mean? Remember that he taught that the elect are actually justified in eternity. Faith does not come into it. Gill explained himself: ‘Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it... Faith is the sense, perception and evidence of our justification’.¹⁴

This merits closer examination. It demands it – it is so utterly foreign to Scripture. That is why I chose Acts 17:11 as the epigraph for this chapter. Let me look at the words ‘manifestation’ and ‘evidence’. I will take them in reverse order.

A look at ‘evidence’ in Hebrews 11:1

The advocates of eternal justification make much of Hebrews 11:1, especially the word ‘evidence’: ‘Faith is the... *evidence* of things not seen’. In particular, they allege, a sinner does not receive his justification by faith; rather, faith gives him the proof, the evidence that he was justified in eternity. In other words, faith follows justification. Is this right?¹⁵

Not at all. This is not a proper deduction from the text. The word means ‘conviction’ (NASB), ‘conviction by demonstration’, even ‘reproof’ (2 Tim. 3:16). ‘Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see’ (NIV). Faith brings truth to us, shows it to us, convinces us of it. So, for instance, by faith we are convinced that God created the universe (Heb. 11:3). By faith we are convinced of the resurrection of the dead. By faith we are convinced of the eternal glory to come. And so on. These things are revealed in Scripture, and by faith we receive within ourselves the evidence, the power, of them. But our believing is *not* an evidence or proof of creation itself, nor our creation in particular. Rather, by faith we are convinced of the fact of creation. We believe what we cannot ‘prove’.

¹⁴ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp199,211,213; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,67. See also Gill’s note in *Crisp* Vol.1 pp91-92.

¹⁵ As I have noted, hyper-Calvinists also argue that unbelief is an evidence of condemnation.

The Principles

Does the same apply to justification? Well, yes and no. Let me explain. God, in his word, has revealed that in eternity he has decreed the justification of his elect, and that at the appointed time, Christ accomplished it. Reading these things in Scripture, by faith we are convinced that it is so. But our faith is not the evidence that it is so! That evidence is to be found in God's word! By faith we receive the inner conviction that it is so, we are persuaded of it.

But this is not what the hyper-Calvinist is arguing. Far from it! He makes the issue personal. He is convinced that when an unbeliever comes to faith, his faith is the evidence to him that he has been eternally justified. Indeed, this is the very thing he believes for. He believes that he might receive the manifestation, the evidence, that he has always been right with God, even from eternity.

This is quite wrong. Faith is not an evidence of our justification. Saving faith *is* an evidence of our *election*, yes (1 Thess. 1:2-10), but not of our eternal justification. It couldn't be, for, while our actual election took place in eternity, our actual justification did not. Hebrews 11:1 could only be applied to the case if the unbeliever could read in Scripture that he, by name, had been elected, God justified him in eternity, and Christ died for him. Now he may scan the Bible as often as he likes, but he will never meet with such a personal statement. Never! Therefore no unbeliever is ever called upon to believe that he is justified.

There is another possibility: perhaps, at the appointed time, God makes a direct revelation to each of the elect that they are elect and eternally justified – and they then believe that direct revelation! Oh? Would somebody show me such a person in the Bible? *This* is not 'justification by faith'!

As for the believer – the one who has trusted Christ and received his righteousness as his (the believer's) actual justification, by the Spirit he can reason out the evidence that God has laid out in his word (1 Thess. 1:2-10, for example) in order to encourage himself that God eternally loved him, decreed his entire salvation, and all was accomplished for him in and through Christ. Yes, of course! But this is very different to the hyper-Calvinistic claim that justification by faith means the unbeliever, as he believes, gets the

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

personal manifestation of his interest in these eternal secrets hidden in God (Deut. 29:29).

Truth to tell, I confess that I cannot sort out the chicken and the egg here. Does the hyper-Calvinist think that the unbeliever receives the manifestation of his election and so believes? Or does he believe in order to get that manifestation?¹⁶

The hyper-Calvinistic notion of ‘manifestation’

Here we come right up, smack, against the major consequence of the hyper-Calvinistic conviction that an elect sinner is actually justified irrespective of his believing. He is so, and has been so, from eternity, by the will of God. In such a system, consistency would mean that believing can only be a bonus, not an absolute necessity.¹⁷ When a sinner believes, he receives a felt sense – a manifestation – of that which was already true; namely, that he is elect and has been actually justified from eternity. But this manifestation is only the icing on the cake. Precious icing, it is true, sweet icing, but icing all the same. The sinner is elect and justified whether or not he believes, whether or not he has any ‘manifestation’. This can only mean that an elect sinner will enjoy everlasting bliss whether or not he ever comes to saving faith! Faith is not necessary. For the hyper-Calvinist, an elect sinner is everlastingly justified whether or not he believes. If he does believe, he gets the manifestation of the fact – *but that is all*. When the sinner believes, according to Gill, he receives *the manifestation, the sense, knowledge, perception or evidence that he has been justified from eternity*. And **this** is what he believes for. According to Gill, it is not that upon believing the sinner is justified. Rather,

¹⁶ Of course, once a sinner has believed, he can have the assurance of his eternal election. But that is not the primary motive or reason for his believing. As I have argued in previous works, the unbeliever has nothing to do with believing in or not believing in his election. His concern is with trusting Christ. And that is the one great essential. A sinner who trusts Christ will be saved. He may have doubts about his election, but he is, nevertheless, saved. A sinner may be confident that he is elect, but unless he trusts Christ he will go to hell confident that he is elect.

¹⁷ As I have indicated, the Case Study will show that the quarrel between the *Gospel Standard* and Septimus Sears centred on the question of whether the elect are safe or not *before they believe*.

upon believing, he is awakened to the fact that he is already justified, and has been so from eternity. *This* is ‘justification by faith’.

Not at all! This must not be allowed to go unchallenged! The sinner does not believe in order to receive the manifestation, the assurance, that he has the righteousness of Christ independent of his believing, and has had it from eternity past. He believes in order to receive the righteousness of Christ, full stop! *This* is ‘justification by faith’. There is a world of difference between a sinner trusting Christ for the imputation of the Redeemer’s righteousness, and a sinner coming to realise that he has never been without it.

We must get to the root of this talk of ‘manifestation’. When I said that, according to the hyper-Calvinist, being justified by faith means receiving *the manifestation, the sense, knowledge, perception or evidence* that one has been justified from eternity, there is a word which nestles at the heart of all this, unstated. I am speaking of ‘revelation’. I know it is my word, but it is fair to use it. By ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists really do mean ‘revelation’. After all, revelation has the idea of ‘disclosure of something previously hidden or secret, a striking disclosure, as of something not before realised’ – the very thing hyper-Calvinists mean by ‘manifestation’.

That being the case, may I ask how it differs, in principle, from Paul’s claim: ‘The gospel... I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the *revelation* of Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 1:11-12)? Again: ‘If indeed you have heard of the grace of God which was given to me... how that by *revelation* he made known to me the mystery... You may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ... as it has now been *revealed* by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets... To me... this grace was given’ (Eph. 3:2-8; see also 2 Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 2:2). I fail to see the essential difference. In short, when they talk about a ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists are, in effect, using apostolic language in terms of *revelation*. That, in itself, rules out their claim.¹⁸

¹⁸ In the Case Study I will show, as I have already shown in my *Septimus*, the *Gospel Standard* falsely accuses free-offer preachers of claiming apostolic powers. Another case of glasshouses and stones.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

This must be explored a little further. ‘To manifest’ is a biblical phrase, needless to say. It often appears in the New Testament as the translation of one of two Greek words, *phaneroō* and *emphanizō*. So, seeing ‘manifest’ is a perfectly good biblical word, why am I making such a song and dance about it? Because of its meanings! ‘To manifest’ takes a spectrum of biblical meaning – ‘to make visible, make clear, make known, uncover, lay bare, reveal, make actual, bring to light, expose, show’.¹⁹ Great care must be shown when using such a powerful word. As a word, it carries heavy overtones.

There are two issues to consider when thinking about hyper-Calvinistic talk of ‘manifestation’. *First*, there is the nature of the action – the act of manifesting. *Secondly*, there is the nature of that which is manifested.

Take the first – the nature of the act. God does ‘manifest’; that is to say, he does reveal (Rom. 3:21, AV; 16:26; Heb. 9:8; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 3:5; for instance). But there is a ‘manifestation’ which is by teaching and instruction (John 17:6; Col. 4:4; Tit. 1:3; for instance). There is yet another ‘manifestation’ in the sense of things being made clear (2 Thess. 1:5; 1 John 2:19; 3:10). And there is also a ‘manifestation’ by the direct impulse of the Spirit (John 14:21-22; see also Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10). Which of these are hyper-Calvinists using when they talk of ‘manifestation’?

As for the second issue – the nature of what is manifested – without intending the slightest disparagement, is this something which we might call ‘ordinary’ (1 Cor. 12:7; 2 Cor. 4:2), or is it ‘extraordinary’ (Rom. 16:25-26)?

While I do not want to over-complicate, neither do I want to be simplistic. I acknowledge that, in Scripture, these various meanings, both for the act of manifesting and the thing manifested, can be highly nuanced, or can overlap a great deal. So much so, it is often impossible to be clear-cut about precisely what is involved in any particular verse. There is a manifestation which is the norm – ‘every-day’, if I may use the term. It is exceedingly special, I hasten to add, but God uses ordinary means – reading, teaching, preaching, conversation, study, meditation – to convey to the believer truth

¹⁹ See Vine pp717-719; Thayer.

and principles already revealed in Scripture. But there is an altogether higher kind of manifestation – independent of ordinary means – by which God directly reveals new truth, new principles to his church. On this latter, I am implacable. I firmly believe that this sort of manifestation ceased with the apostles. But, as for the former, I also believe, with John Robinson, that God has yet more light to break out of his word.²⁰ In addition to these two, we know that the Spirit conveys the truth into the heart of the believer – to manifest it in and to the believer.

Now when hyper-Calvinists talk of manifestation in connection with justification, they give me the impression – to put it no higher – they give me the distinct impression that they are looking for some special experience, some sort of revelation, some direct, inward communication from God in some special or remarkable way. And they are looking for a revelation of a truth about themselves as individuals, a truth hidden in God's secret decrees, a truth not revealed before, a truth which could not be discovered by reading Scripture and applying its principles to oneself, testing oneself against it. It goes further than the inner witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10).²¹ It is an experience in which God, as it were, opens his book of hitherto secret decrees, and allows the individual concerned to read the entry against his name. The sensible sinner is afforded special access to the secret things of God insofar as they concern his personal justification. In other words, the hyper-Calvinistic 'manifestation' is mystical; it has the sense of a direct communication of God's secret decree to the individual. As has been said, and I have already quoted, it is nothing less than 'the manifestation of an eternal secret'.²² And this is what they call 'justification by faith'.

The fact is, however, there is not an atom of Scripture to suggest that this is what the Bible means by 'justification by faith'. Nor is there a single scriptural example of any sinner (sensible or not)

²⁰ His farewell address to those boarding the *Speedwell* at Delfthaven in 1620. The last two lines of each verse of George Rawson's 'We limit not the truth of God': 'The Lord hath yet more light and truth/ To break forth from his word' (*The Baptist Hymnal* 1933, number 200).

²¹ Which, in any event, is a witness to the believer – not the unbeliever.

²² Robert Seymour in Daniel p335.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

having this ‘manifestation’ experience. There is only one word for it, therefore: wrong! It is wrong. And as such, it is highly dangerous. Even though hyper-Calvinists appear to be using a biblical word, in truth they are actually *abusing* it.

Let me illustrate what I am trying to say. Take the word ‘revelation’ in Ephesians 1:17-18, where Paul prays that believers may be given ‘the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him’, ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory’. I contend that this is ‘ordinary revelation’, in a totally different league to ‘apostolic revelation’. Paul is referring to the operation of the Holy Spirit, who takes the written word, especially in reference to Christ, and makes that word, makes Christ, feelingly known to the *believer*, and does so in an increasing way. The apostle is also speaking of the inner work of the Spirit in enlightening and enlivening the believer. But this is not at all the same as ‘apostolic revelation’; that is, the unveiling of new truth, unknown before. Nor, and this is my point, is it the same as the hyper-Calvinist’s claim of a ‘manifestation’, to the sensible sinner, still an unbeliever, of God’s secret decree to justify *him* as one of the elect; more, to confirm that he was actually justified in eternity.

Again, if anybody should try to justify the hyper-Calvinistic use of ‘manifestation’ by quoting: ‘The righteousness of God without the law is manifested’ (Rom. 3:21, AV), they would soon find they had bitten off more than they could chew. First of all, notice the NKJV rightly uses ‘revealed’. Revelation is precisely what the apostle is talking about here. But, in this verse, Paul is not speaking in terms of individual experience. The context proves it. The apostle’s use of ‘but now’ proves it. Paul is speaking about the momentous change of the ages with the ending of the epoch of the law and the beginning of the epoch of the gospel. And justification, ‘the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe’ (Rom. 3:21-22), is a principal part of this epochal change, this glorious revelation, this manifestation. What Paul is speaking about was, beyond all question, a ‘revelation’! But by no stretch of the imagination are we warranted to take this kind of biblical language concerning events at the watershed of the ages, and apply it to the personal experience of ‘justification by faith’.

The Principles

The fact is, with their talk of ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists seriously muddle faith and assurance. Actual justification is not a question of assurance or feeling. As we saw right at the start, actual justification is a legal declaration by God that the sinner in question is righteous. The sinner receives that justification when he looks to Christ. *This* is the justification, and *this* is the faith, we are talking about. Once the sinner has trusted Christ for his justification, he then receives the assurance of it. There is no issue, needless to say, with that! A believer, once he has been actually justified in experience, knows, feels and enjoys the assurance of his justification. He certainly does! ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). ‘In Christ Jesus our Lord... we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him’ (Eph. 3:11-12). ‘In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence’ (Eph. 3:12, NIV). The believer receives the inward witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10), no less. *But that assurance is not the essence of justifying faith.* I am not nit-picking.

Hyper-Calvinists, however, think that assurance *is* the issue. For them, ‘justification by faith’ is the realisation in the sinner’s conscience that he has been actually justified all along, and been so from eternity. In other words, the sinner believes in order to get the assurance of his eternal justification, not to receive the justification itself. Hyper-Calvinists will not have it that *actual* justification follows faith. Strange, then, that so many of them are prepared to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn:

*Jesus, how glorious is thy grace!
When in thy name we trust,
Our faith receives a righteousness
That makes the sinner just.*²³

Strange, too, that they can sing Joseph Hart’s hymn:

*The sinner that truly believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His justification receives,
Redemption in full through his blood.*²⁴

²³ Gadsby’s *Hymns* number 111.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Take note of the words. The sinner's 'faith receives a righteousness that makes [him] just'; the sinner that believes, 'his justification [he] receives'. These hymn writers were talking, as they should, about the sinner's actual justification, *not* the sense or manifestation of his justification. When a sinner believes, he is justified. He receives the righteousness of Christ. And not before. He does not get the assurance that he was justified in eternity.

Let me look more closely at this hyper-Calvinistic confusion of justification, assurance and saving faith.

The confusion of justification, assurance and saving faith

Gill: 'I assert that there is no knowledge of justification, no comfort from it, nor any claim of interest in it, until a man believes'.²⁵ Excellent. But let us remind ourselves of some other words from Gill, words which we have already met:

The reason why [the elect] have faith is because they are justified.²⁶ Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified, is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified... Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it... Faith is the sense, perception and evidence of our justification.²⁷

Finally, a negative. Gill did *not* say that until a man believes, he is not actually justified. He did not say it, because he did not believe it. What he did believe was that the elect are actually justified in eternity, and this leads to faith at God's appointed time.

What can we make of Gill's link between justification, faith and comfort? He got it wrong! Note the order, for a start! A sinner does not believe because he is justified and wants to get the comfort or assurance of it. Not at all! The biblical position is that a sinner believes because he has come to know he is a sinner and needs to be saved. And underneath it all, and all unknown to him, the sinner believes because God has elected him and drawn him to Christ in

²⁴ *Gadsby's Hymns* number 233; see also number 764.

²⁵ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 p155; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp50,104,106.

²⁶ Gill: *Body* Vol.1 p299.

²⁷ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp197,199,211,213; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,67. See also Gill's note in *Crisp* Vol.1 pp91-92.

order that he might trust the Saviour and so be justified. Comfort and assurance follow the sinner's believing and his being justified.

For the hyper-Calvinist, however, justifying faith is not – as the Scriptures teach – a sinner coming to rest his soul upon Christ, and receiving the imputation of Christ's righteousness to make him right with God. No! It is the assurance, the confirmation, the revelation, the manifestation, conveyed to the sinner's mind and heart, that God has elected him and justified him in Christ from eternity. Ella explained: 'To Gill, faith declares to the believer that Christ has died in particular, for him'; 'that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ *for him*'.²⁸

At first glance, this (apart from the note about faith speaking) is perfectly correct. God – not faith! – does assure the believer that he is elect, that Christ died for him, and so on – Galatians 2:20, for instance. Yes. *But there is a very serious misunderstanding or misapplication of Scripture here. We are talking about unbelievers coming to faith – not believers looking for assurance.* Assurance of personal election and particular redemption is not the unbeliever's concern – nor can he know that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular – until he himself repents and trusts Christ for salvation.

Nevertheless, Gill thought the sinner's justification under gospel preaching to be 'the declarative sentence of it upon the conscience, by the Spirit of God, and received by faith'.²⁹ Again:

The justification here [Tit. 3:7] spoken of is a declarative one, which takes place in regeneration... Regeneration does not justify any, but makes the justified to appear to be such... and this is declared in the conscience of a sinner, by the Spirit of God, at his regeneration, when he passes from death to life; and this declaration is here intended, and which is the same [as] with justification by faith.³⁰

²⁸ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p109, emphasis his; Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p223.

²⁹ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p103.

³⁰ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p671. By the way, the sensible sinner is supposed to be regenerate. So why is any sensible sinner waiting for the manifestation of his justification? According to Gill, he got it, 'declared in [his] conscience... at his regeneration'!

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Gill was wrong. Do not miss his substitution of ‘regeneration’ for ‘faith’. Let me repeat my earlier comments on the passage: ‘Justification follows regeneration. Justification follows faith, of course, but that is not the issue Paul is dealing with here – although, within the same breath, he moves on to it: “Those who have believed in God” (Tit. 3:8). The fact is, until he is regenerated and brought to faith in Christ, the elect sinner is unjustified. This is what Paul says’. As far as I can see, the Bible always talks about justification by faith; never by regeneration. Regeneration precedes faith, needless to say. I and the hyper-Calvinist agree about *that*. But justification is by faith, not by regeneration.

Again, notice Gill’s ‘regeneration does not justify any, but makes the justified to *appear* to be such’. Echoes of his ‘as if’ when commenting on 1 Corinthians 6:11, I think.

What is more, Gill was quite wrong to claim that justification by faith is the declaration to the sinner’s conscience that he was justified in eternity. Certainly not! Rather, when a sinner is regenerated and trusts Christ, he then is actually justified, actually accounted righteous by God. This is what ‘justification by faith’ is.

When linking faith and justification, according to Ella, Gill taught that:

Faith is... a prerequisite of justification in that it gives us a knowledge of justification and the comforts of justification... No man is evidently and declaratively justified until he believes. In other words, faith receives the blessing of justification and the enjoyment of it.³¹

But this is not saving faith; this is not what the New Testament means by ‘justification by faith’. I am not for a moment denying the Spirit’s bearing witness with the believer’s spirit, granting him assurance (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10), but this is the Spirit’s witness with the spirit of one *who has already trusted the Saviour for his salvation*, and is, therefore, justified; *it is not saving faith*. But *that* – saving or justifying faith – is what we are supposed to be talking about. And as for saving faith, Paul dealt with *that* matter – the trusting of Christ – long before Romans 8:14! See Romans 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-11; 8:1. The same goes for Galatians 4:6 and 1 John 5:10. It was to believers, and only believers, that the

³¹ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p104.

The Principles

apostles wrote concerning the effects of saving faith, including assurance and comfort.

When a sinner trusts Christ, he does not do so in order to receive the persuasion in his conscience that he is justified. He trusts Christ in order to receive the imputed righteousness of Christ and so *be* justified. In the first instance, it is not a question of feelings. It is a matter of *fact* – God constitutes and declares the believing sinner righteous. Feelings, comfort and assurance accompany and follow, certainly, but only to the sinner after he has trusted Christ in order to be justified.

Let me stress this. I am not for a moment suggesting that feelings do not come into it. I am no Sandemanian. But feelings are not the primary issue at the point of a sinner's actual justification. Feelings accompany and follow saving faith, yes. But they are not the essence of saving faith. I have already quoted Edward Mote:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

I take 'frame' here to mean 'feeling, frame of mind'; for my justification, I dare not trust the sweetest feeling. So, I am convinced, wrote the hymn writer. Hyper-Calvinists sing it.³² And yet, all the time, their preachers and writers are encouraging them to wait for a manifestation! What is that – if not a feeling? Do they not seek a manifestation – and then trust in it?

The point is, Mote was catching hold of something absolutely vital. However the word is understood, it is altogether too possible to look for feelings (or something else) rather than look to Christ. This mistake is fatal. *I dare not trust* the sweetest feeling (or anything else). Note the 'dare not'. I would not be misunderstood. As I have shown, after a sinner believes and repents, upon his repentant faith, as a direct consequence of his saving faith, he is given the assurance of such things, and therefore enjoys the comfort of them. But hyper-Calvinists claim that this assurance is the

³² *Gadsby's Hymns* number 1106. If, however, such people say they are not dismissing 'feelings', but are thinking of something else, does that mean they do rely on 'feeling' after all?

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

essence of saving faith, that unconverted sinners *believe for* these things. Indeed, that it is only *after* they have such assurance that they actually trust Christ. But, as Mote so rightly said, true hope comes from resting on Christ and his work, and nothing else.

To illustrate what this hyper-Calvinism leads to, consider the changes that will have to be introduced into the following:

Whoever believes in [Christ] should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who believes in him is not condemned... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life (John 3:15-18,36). He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life ... You are not willing to come to me that you may have life (John 5:24,40). Believe in the light that you may become sons of light (John 12:36). Repent... if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you (Acts 8:22). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

If the hyper-Calvinists are right, that paragraph will have to be understood as saying:

Whoever believes in [Christ] should not perish (*of which, in any case, there was never any danger, for he never was under the wrath of God*) but *come to realise that he has always had* eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should *be given the assurance that from eternity he has been delivered from perishing* but **[this vital word is now superfluous]** *having come to realise that from eternity they have had* everlasting life... He who believes in him *comes to the realisation that he has never been under condemnation*... He who believes in the Son *comes to the assurance that from eternity he has had* everlasting life... He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me *comes to realise that from eternity he has had* everlasting life... You are not willing to come to me that you may have *the assurance that from eternity you have had* life... Believe in the light that you may *come to realise that you are* sons of light... Repent... if perhaps *you may have the assurance that from eternity* the thought of your heart *has been forgiven* you... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will *come to realise that you, from all eternity, have been* saved.

Poppycock! So, although Gill could rightly say of the sinner coming to faith: 'And therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification', note

the opening ‘and therefore’. This little phrase holds within it a qualification which ruins all. Let me quote more fully:

That faith by which a man is said to be justified, is not a mere assurance of the object, or a bare persuasion that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ; but that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ for him; *and therefore* he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification.

Note it well, reader. According to Gill, the unbeliever receives far more than the assurance that Christ can justify – he receives the assurance that Christ has justified him in particular. And this before believing! Indeed, this is Gill’s very point, is it not? It is *because* the unbeliever has received that assurance that he *then* believes! Let me return to Ella’s clarification of Gill’s view: ‘To Gill, faith declares to the believer that Christ has died in particular for him; *and therefore* he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification’.³³

What a tangled skein! Let me try to unravel it. What I say about Gill applies, obviously, to Ella who quoted him and told us what Gill meant.

In the first place, while I do not want to fault a man for a word, words do matter. Taking Ella strictly at his word – and Ella, down the years, has been nothing if not precise – let me highlight an immediate confusion. Ella said that ‘to Gill, faith declares³⁴ to *the believer* that Christ has died in particular for him; and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification’. According to Ella, therefore, Gill was talking about a believer. But I thought we were supposed to be talking about *an unconverted sinner, an unbeliever*. Gill most definitely was. What is more, if Ella *was* being precise, he claimed that Gill was arguing that faith speaks to this believer, assuring him that Christ died in particular for him, and as a result, this believer,

³³ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p223; Ella: *Gill and Justification* p109, emphasis Ella’s.

³⁴ As before, I find this a very odd way of putting it, but I let it stand. There may be more to it than meets the eye, however. Faith, as the hand that receives (Crisp Vol.1 p91; Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p996; *Sermons* Vol.4 p199), has morphed into the voice which authoritatively declares.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

now assured that Christ died for him in particular, believes and trusts Christ's righteousness for justification – 'and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification'. In other words, the believer, *having been* persuaded that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular, *then* trusts Christ for the righteousness required to justify him.

I am baffled. When is a believer not a believer? Is it possible for a believer to have the God-given assurance that Christ died for him – that he is elect – and yet not have trusted Christ? What is more, if he is a believer, does that not mean he must have trusted Christ? Isn't that what the Bible means by saving faith?

So let us proceed on the basis that Ella was not being meticulous. In other words, let us assume that what he *meant* to tell us was that 'to Gill, faith declares to *the unbelieving sinner* that Christ has died in particular for him; and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification'. That is what Gill did mean, as he himself made clear. Proceeding on this basis, then, according to Ella, Gill thought that the *unbeliever*, *the sinner*, having been persuaded that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular, then trusts Christ for the righteousness required to justify him. This has the merit of being rational and pertinent. After all, we are supposed to be talking about unbelievers coming to faith. Gill certainly was.

Even so, Gill was inconsistent – or contradicted himself. If not, he certainly confused me. With his view, he should have said that the sinner comes to believe that he has been justified from eternity. But he didn't. Again, why should this sinner plead Christ's righteousness for justification when, according to Gill, he is already actually justified – in eternity? And what of the claim that once a sinner is persuaded that Christ died for him in particular, he then believes? This is unbiblical. For, as Gill rightly said elsewhere: 'The doctrine of particular redemption ascertains the salvation of some, and all that believe in Christ have reason to conclude their interest in it, every blessing of grace here, and eternal life

The Principles

hereafter’;³⁵ in other words, the persuasion of particular redemption follows faith. Quite right too! This *is* biblical.

So, putting Gill’s statements together, it is not just a case of chicken and egg, is it? As before, I cannot work out which is the chicken and which is the egg. Is the faith the egg or the chicken? Which came first? The faith or the justification? The believing or the assurance of election – which, for Gill, precedes the other, and which leads to the other? What *was* his view? Gill was totally out of order to say that a sinner comes to the assurance and persuasion that he is elect and Christ died for him – and *then* believes! Nobody can produce such a case in Scripture or experience. It is impossible. It is not only an impossibility – to know that we are elect before we believe – it is quite misguided to want to know it. As David Clarkson said: It is ‘impertinent to trouble yourself about this’.³⁶ Furthermore, it is wrong to make an unbeliever think of it. In Scripture, saving faith leads to justification which leads to assurance.

Augustus Toplady, therefore, was badly mistaken to say:

*How happy are we
Our election who see,
And venture, O Lord,
For salvation on thee!*³⁷

Where in Scripture, do we come across such a sinner? Rather, he should have written:

*How happy are we
Our election who see,
Having ventured, O Lord,
For salvation on thee!*

So what did Gill make of: ‘The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and upon all who believe... [God is]... the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ (Rom. 3:22,26)? What did he make of: ‘Having been justified by faith’ (Rom. 5:1)? What did he make of: ‘We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the

³⁵ Gill: *Cause* p172.

³⁶ Clarkson: *Of Faith* pp98,127-128. See my *Offer; Particular; Septimus*.

³⁷ *Gadsby’s Hymns* number 68; *Gospel Hymns* number 454.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ' (Gal. 2:15-16)? Just this:

Faith is... a³⁸ means of our knowledge, and perception of our justification by Christ's righteousness, and our enjoying the comfort of it... Faith is... a means of receiving and apprehending Christ's righteousness; the discovery of it is made to³⁹ faith; that grace [that is, faith] discerns the excellency and suitableness of it... lays hold on this...⁴⁰ These Jews did not believe in Christ, in order that by their believing to procure [that is, they might procure] their justification before God, and acceptance with him, but that they might receive, by faith, this blessing from the Lord in their own conscience, and enjoy the comfort of it.⁴¹

Take that last. Referring to Galatians 2:15-16, Gill: 'These Jews did not believe in Christ, in order that by their believing [they might] procure their justification before God'? Really? To my mind, *that* is precisely why they did believe! They believed in order 'to procure their justification before God, and acceptance with him'.⁴² Let me remind you of the apostle's actual words: 'We who are Jews by nature... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ' (Gal. 2:15-16); 'that we might be' – please note – 'we have believed in Christ Jesus' in order to 'be justified by faith in Christ'.

³⁸ I really cannot understand 'a' here, and later in the extract. Shouldn't it be 'the'?

³⁹ Do not miss the 'to'. This is a very important give-away. I think Rom. 1:17 is the only place in Scripture where it is used – and I doubt very much that Rom. 1:17 is speaking as Gill. Justification is obtained by faith; it is not revealed to faith. The former is biblical; the latter is hyper-Calvinistic.

⁴⁰ Notice Gill was once again contradicting himself here. To be consistent with himself, he should have said faith is the means of having a manifestation in the conscience of one's eternal justification. He did not. He rightly said that by faith a sinner lays hold of Christ's righteousness! If he had kept to that, he would never have promulgated eternal justification.

⁴¹ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 pp21-23,30,374.

⁴² Procure, obtain, secure, get hold of, get.

Gill was making the same mistake as he did before. ‘Justification by faith’, according to Gill, means the sinner coming to the perception of his justification from eternity. Ella explained that Gill thought this to be ‘faith awakening in the believer, so that he knows he now stands guiltless before God and trusts in the Saviour who has made this possible’.⁴³ Here, once again, we have the hyper-Calvinistic view. That is, when the sinner exercises saving faith, he does so in order to come to an assurance that he is guiltless – an assurance that he has been elected and actually justified from eternity. And this, according to the hyper-Calvinist, is the essence of justifying faith. Once he has that assurance, then, and then only, does he trust in Christ. But, I say again, this is wrong, quite wrong. It is also muddled, as so often with hyper-Calvinism. According to the hyper-Calvinist, does the sinner exercise justifying faith because he *knows* he is elect? or in order to *become assured* that he is elect? Talk about carts and horses. In any case, *this is not justifying faith*.

Despite this, according to Gill, the sinner, coming to faith, receives the assurance and *comfort* of his justification. This constitutes being justified by faith. Let me return to those extracts from Gill, and emphasise the word in question. First, let Ella summarise Gill’s position: ‘Faith is... a prerequisite of justification in that it gives us a knowledge of justification and the *comforts* of justification’.⁴⁴ Now Gill’s actual words:

I assert that there is no knowledge of justification, no *comfort* from it, nor any claim of interest in it, until a man believes.⁴⁵ Faith is... a⁴⁶ means of our knowledge, and perception of our justification by Christ’s righteousness, and our enjoying the *comfort* of it... These Jews... [believed] in Christ... that they might receive, by faith, this blessing [of justification]... in their own conscience, and enjoy the *comfort* of it.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp104-105. Note the weakening of the biblical position with Ella’s ‘possible’. Here we have a hyper-Calvinist adopting Amyraldian views. See my *Particular*.

⁴⁴ Ella: *Gill and Justification* p104, emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 p155; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp50,104,106, emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ As before, ‘the’ is surely better.

⁴⁷ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 pp30,374, emphasis mine.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

And again:

And those that believe in Christ with the heart unto righteousness, are openly and manifestly justified in their own consciences, and can claim their interest in it, and have the *comfort* of it, as well as they were before secretly justified in the mind of God, and in their head and representative Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

According to Gill, ‘justification by faith’ means getting the comfort, the assurance of one’s eternal justification. Yet Paul put it precisely the other way round: ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God’ (Rom. 5:1). That is: ‘Having been justified by faith’ – by experience through faith, not by God’s decree in eternity – ‘having been [actually] justified by faith, [then] we have peace with God’ (Rom. 5:1). That is, it is only *after* faith that a sinner is justified and only *then* he has peace with God; before he comes to faith, he is not justified, the wrath of God is upon him, and he has no peace with God – as we saw when looking at Ephesians 2:3. Calvin certainly knew a sinner’s comfort arises out of, and after, his justification by faith: ‘Miserable souls... are rendered quiet and tranquil, *when* [they] have obtained the righteousness by faith’.⁴⁹ Until they believe, sinners have no comfort and peace. The reason is plain: until they believe, they are not justified. There is no such thing as eternal justification, as defined by the hyper-Calvinist.

Applying the principle across the scriptural board

The hyper-Calvinistic principle at stake cannot be limited to justification. As we have seen, Bavinck hit the nail on the head: ‘If one speaks of justification as eternal, he should consistently also speak of creation, incarnation, sacrifice, calling and regeneration as eternal’.⁵⁰ That is to say, if justification is eternal, and ‘justification by faith’ means that I receive the manifestation that I was actually justified in eternity, and have been justified all along, then the same

⁴⁸ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p905, emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p187, emphasis mine. The hyper-Calvinist must say that souls are rendered tranquil when they get the manifestation that they have always been justified.

⁵⁰ See Berkouwer p147.

sort of thing must be said right across the board. Philip Doddridge rightly pointed out the same about ‘glorification’.⁵¹

Let’s try it. Think about pardon, the forgiveness of sins, for instance. What is exactly taking place when a sinner comes to saving faith? What is he believing for? And whom – or what – is he believing? We have to face up to these questions and come to a decision on them. Eternal consequences hang on the answers. Is there any doubt that the Bible surely teaches that it is as a sinner trusts Christ for forgiveness that he is actually forgiven? It is not that he gets a manifestation that he has been always forgiven, even from eternity past. Upon believing, we ‘receive forgiveness of sins’ (Acts 26:18). When we ‘confess our sins’, God forgives us (1 John 1:9).

Let me explore and expose the hyper-Calvinistic position on this. I begin with Gill’s comments on Acts 26:18:

Forgiveness of sins [is] an act of God’s free grace, through the blood of Christ, which was shed for it; and which free and full forgiveness is published in the gospel, that whoever believes in Christ may, by faith, receive it... It is a gift of God, which is received by the hand of faith into the conscience of the enlightened sinner; the consequences of which are peace, joy and comfort.⁵²

While there is much that is excellent here, I note the emphasis upon ‘conscience’ and ‘comfort’. The fact is, however, as Gill himself stated, when the sinner believes, he receives forgiveness. Yes, conscience and peace and joy and comfort all come into it. But the point is, until a sinner believes he is unforgiven. It is only as he believes that he is forgiven. ‘Peace, joy and comfort’ are the consequences of forgiveness. The same goes for justification.

What of the apostle’s declaration: ‘You, being dead in your trespasses... he has made alive together with [Christ]’ (Col. 2:13)? Gill said these words:

May be interpreted of the quickening of them in justification... and that either openly, as when a sinner is convinced that he is dead in a law-sense, and faith is wrought in him to behold pardon and righteousness in Christ; upon which he prays for the one, and pleads the other...

⁵¹ Clifford p144.

⁵² Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p996.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

I pause here. I am afraid I have to confess myself utterly at a loss as to what Gill meant by his ‘quickenings of them in justification’.⁵³ Passing over that – as I fear I must – when Gill said the sinner is enabled ‘to behold pardon and righteousness in Christ’, did he mean that the sinner beholds – sees, understands – that *he himself* is pardoned and justified? If so, why should he then pray for pardon and justification? Or did Gill mean that the sinner sees the *possibility* of pardon and justification and so prays for them?⁵⁴ I ask, therefore, what, precisely, *did* Gill mean? I am pretty sure he meant that when the sinner comes to realise he is actually pardoned and justified in Christ, that this encourages and confirms him to pray for pardon and plead his righteousness.

If so, for all their love of, and demand for, absolute logical consistency and water-tight argument, it is simply staggering how illogical hyper-Calvinists can be at times. Note the inbuilt hyper-Calvinistic contradiction. The sinner, coming to faith, is assured he was pardoned and justified in eternity. He then prays for pardon – supposedly, not for the sense or assurance of it, mark you – he prays for pardon. On the other hand, he pleads his righteousness in Christ. Would – could – some hyper-Calvinist sort out this view of assurance, justification and faith for me? Consistency – the Bible, indeed – demands that the sinner should pray for both – pardon and justification – and, then, having been pardoned and justified, come to realise that both were earned for him personally on the cross and decreed for him personally in eternity. According to Gill, as far as I can grasp his meaning, a pardoned and righteous (in Christ) sinner, assured of his pardon and justification, then prays for pardon, pleading the fact that he is righteous. But if he is righteous in Christ, he must already be pardoned. He can’t be the one without having the other, surely?

Nevertheless, let Gill continue:

The Spirit of God seals unto him the pardon of his sins, brings near the righteousness of Christ, and pronounces him justified by it; and [this] may well be called justification of life, for he is then alive in a law-sense, in his own comfortable view and apprehension of things.

⁵³ Or was he, as before, conflating justification and election?

⁵⁴ If so, he was taking the Amyraldian (if not the Arminian) line here. See my *Particular*.

The Principles

If this is not the right exposition, said Gill, then perhaps Paul was speaking of that which was done:

Secretly in Christ, as the head and representative of his people; who when he was quickened, they were quickened with him; when he rose from the dead, they rose with him; and when he was justified, they were justified in him; and this seems to be the true sense of the passage: ‘having forgiven you all trespasses’. This was a past act, being done and over; not only when a discovery of it was made, but at the death of Christ.⁵⁵

Let me unpack this. Gill was saying that the sinner’s coming to faith is the discovery that he is already pardoned and already justified, having been so from eternity, and on the cross and in the resurrection of Christ. This is what ‘justification by faith’ means. It is a ‘discovery’, a ‘manifestation’, an unveiling of an entry in God’s secret book of eternal decrees, to enable this particular sinner to read the record, against his name, of the fact that, since eternity past, he has been eternally justified.

How wrong can one be? This is not the biblical position at all. Far from it. According to Scripture, when the sinner comes to faith, he looks to God in Christ. He believes, trusts Christ for pardon and justification, and – upon his believing – the sinner receives his pardon and justification. Then, and only then, can the sinner discover or realise or be assured that he is elect and was pardoned and justified by God’s decree in eternity, and on the cross and in the resurrection of Christ. As Gill himself said, Paul told the jailer (Acts 16:31) ‘to look unto [Christ] alone for life and salvation, to rely upon him, and trust in him; to commit himself, and the care of his immortal soul unto him, to expect peace, pardon, righteousness and eternal life from him’.⁵⁶ Quite. He did not tell him to believe *that he was actually pardoned in eternity*. So much for pardon. And what applies to pardon, applies to justification.

Now for the gift of the Spirit. How does the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine play out in this matter? The gift of the Spirit was decreed by God in eternity, surely? It was also merited for the elect by

⁵⁵ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p522; see also, for instance, *Commentary* Vol.5 pp597,620-621,626,645,721.

⁵⁶ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p930; see also pp620,649,861.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Christ on the cross, surely? But when do the elect *actually* receive the Spirit? Paul's rhetorical question makes it clear: 'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:2). The elect receive the gift of the Spirit at the point of believing. In saying this, I am being deliberately 'vague'. I have no intention of exploring the impenetrable; that is to say, I am not going to try to sort out all that happens as the sovereign Spirit secretly brings a sinner from regeneration to faith.⁵⁷ The general point is clear. It is as the sinner believes that he receives the Spirit. Gill thought so: 'While the gospel is preaching [the Spirit] falls on them that hear it, conveys himself into their hearts and begets them again by the word of truth'.⁵⁸ Precisely. Before they savingly hear the gospel, the elect do not have the Spirit; but as they effectively hear the gospel, they receive the Spirit. The point is, *they do not receive the assurance that they were given the Spirit in eternity*. In fact, it surely goes without saying, they did not receive the Spirit in eternity! What applies to the gift of the Spirit in this regard, applies to justification.

The same goes for: 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:10). The elect do not produce the 'good works' until they have believed (Eph. 2:8-10), even though they were 'created in Christ' for those works, this having been decreed in eternity past. Until they believe, they cannot produce good works – even though, in eternity, God has decreed that, in time, they will.

When does a sinner become a child of God? This question, please note, is not to be confused with another: When is a sinner elected? The elect sinner is elected in eternity. My question is: When does that elect sinner become an actual child of God? We can ask other,

⁵⁷ Then again, with regard to the question in hand, it does not matter precisely what is meant by the gift of the Spirit in Gal. 3:2. The believer receives the Spirit. Paul was speaking to believers about either the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, or the effects and fruits of saving faith (assurance, sealing, and so on). I think the latter. See Brown pp109-110; Dunn pp152-155.

⁵⁸ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p378.

related, questions: When does an elect sinner become a son of God? When does he receive his adoption as a son? Is he a child of God, an adopted son of God, from eternity? Was he born into this world a child, a son of God? Of course not! No! As with all men, he was born into this world in Adam, with all that that entails (John 8:31-55; Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:1-3; 5:6,8). We know that God has children, sons and daughters (John 1:12-13; 13:33; 21:5; Rom. 8:14-15; 2 Cor. 6:18). And we further know that, in his decree, from eternity, he predestined his elect to be his children, adopted sons of God (John 6:37,39; 17:2,6,24; Eph. 1:3-6; Heb. 2:10,13). What is more, God not only predestined it, at God's appointed time, Christ came into the world to do all that was necessary to bring it about (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:3-7). But none of the elect are actual children of God, adopted sons of God, either from eternity or at the cross.

It is as a sinner believes that he becomes a child of God, an adopted son of God (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26), and not before. In fact, the elect will not receive their full and final adoption until the last day (Rom. 8:23; Heb. 3:14). But, for my purposes, an elect sinner becomes a child of God, becomes an adopted son of God, upon his believing. Let me stress this. It is when he *believes* that he becomes an actual child of God, a son of God (John 1:12-13), not when he is given the revelation that he is elect and was made an actual son of God in eternity. It is not that, having been assured that he has been a son of God from eternity, he then believes, and receives the comfort of it.

Not so Gill: 'Though the elect of God... are the children of God before faith... yet no man can know his adoption, nor enjoy the comfort of it, or claim his interest in it, until he believes'.⁵⁹ That is, according to Gill, before they come to faith, the elect are God's *actual* children, *actually* adopted, and so on. When they come to faith, they come into the assurance and comfort of it. This, according to Gill, is what 'coming to Christ' means. Note Gill's emphasis upon 'comfort'. The sinner, according to Gill, coming to faith, receives the assurance and *comfort* of his adoption. This is a

⁵⁹ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p597.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

bad mistake. Until he believes, he is not actually a son of God at all!

The fact is, Gill was unclear on ‘the children of God’ (John 11:52): ‘By which may be meant, not only the elect of God among the Jews, who were scattered amidst the nations of the world, for whom Christ died... but rather the elect of God among the Gentiles... because they were the children of God by special adoption, in divine predestination, and in the covenant of grace; and were so considered, when given to Christ, who looked upon them as in this relation, when he assumed their nature, and died in their room and stead; and not merely because they would hereafter appear to be the children of God in regeneration, and by faith in Christ Jesus, and have the witnessings of the Spirit that they were so’.⁶⁰ This could be interpreted as *actual* (which is wrong) or *decreed* (which is right) children of God in eternity. Calvin was much better: ‘It is therefore by election that he *reckons* as the children of God, even before they are called, those who at length begin to be manifested by faith both to themselves and to others’.⁶¹

Scripture distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil, the children of the world (Matt. 13:38; Luke 16:8; John 8:31-55; Eph. 2:1-3; 5:6,8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 John 3:8-10). This distinction, however, is not between those who were eternally decreed to be the children of God, and those who were eternally decreed to be children of the devil. As I have shown, until a sinner is converted, he is in Adam. He looks like, he acts like, he is, a child of the devil. It is only as he believes that he becomes an actual child of God. The distinction is between believers and unbelievers.

Think of repentance. Take those of whom it is said: ‘If God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will’ (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Gill was clear. God has his elect among such, and ‘though [it] is not certain [that is, we cannot know] that God will give repentance to such [that is, to any in particular]... yet as it is his will that all his chosen ones should [will] come to repentance... and

⁶⁰ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p713.

⁶¹ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 p455, emphasis mine.

seeing these things have been brought about under and by the ministry of the word, it is an encouragement to the ministers of the gospel to continue their instructions in the manner here directed'.⁶² Excellent! As Gill here recognised, the elect before conversion, as much as the non-elect, are taken captive by Satan. At conversion, the elect escape the devil's snare, and repent. The non-elect never do. The same goes for justification. Before faith, the elect – in common with all men – are unjustified.

Take deliverance. We know that 'the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one' (1 John 5:19), 'the ruler of this world' (John 12:31) – and until they are converted, that includes the elect. Until they are converted and thus delivered 'from this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4), they are as much members of this present age, under the devil, as any reprobate. It is only at conversion that the elect are translated out of this realm of this present age. As for deliverance, so for justification.

Take 1 Peter 1:9. What is the 'end' or 'goal' of a believer's faith? Salvation. As Alexander Nisbet said: 'While [when, even as] believers do close with Christ offered in the gospel, they do thereby receive in the arms of their faith an undoubted right to, and some⁶³ begun possession of, eternal salvation, which is here called the end of their faith'.⁶⁴ This, of course, is the cause and source of the believer's joy spoken of in the verse – but, even so, the believer, upon his believing, receives salvation – salvation itself, not a manifestation that he always has been saved, even from eternity past. It is only as a consequence of receiving this salvation that he then receives the joy and comfort of it. But until he believes he is not saved, and has no joy or comfort. The joy and comfort come from the actual experience of salvation – not directly from God's decree to save, nor from an unbeliever's persuasion that God has decreed his salvation, and Christ has accomplished it. The same applies to justification.

⁶² Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p637.

⁶³ Full salvation must await the eternal state, of course.

⁶⁴ Nisbet p26.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

When does Christ begin to live in the elect (Gal. 2:20)? When they believe, and not before (Gal. 2:16-20). When do they pass from darkness to light, from death to life (Col. 1:13; 1 John 3:14)? When they are regenerated and brought to faith, and not before (Col. 1:4-8; 1 John 3:23 – really, the entire letter). When is a sinner free of condemnation? When he believes (John 3:18), and not before; that is, when he is ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 8:1). Moreover, it is when he believes, not when he is given the revelation, the manifestation, that he is elect and was justified in eternity.

Take Ephesians 1:3-14. The cause, the source, the origin of ‘every spiritual blessing’ the elect receive is nothing less than the love of God displayed in his electing and predestinating decree and purpose. Of the many inestimable benefits God’s decree produces for the elect, the apostle includes the following: God makes his elect holy and blameless, he adopts them as his sons, he accepts them, redeems them, forgives them, gathers them together in eternal bliss, gives them an inheritance, and seals them until the dawning of the day of everlasting blessing.⁶⁵ All these benefits are ‘in Christ’, ‘in the beloved’, ‘in him’. And all lead ‘to the praise of the glory’ of the triune God.

The question is, how and when, precisely, do the elect come into all these benefits? This, too, is made perfectly clear. It is through the elect being brought to ‘trust in Christ’. The point is this: The elect receive none of these blessings – redemption, forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, sealing – until they trust Christ. All these benefits were decreed for them in eternity past, yes. They were all obtained for them by Christ’s death and resurrection, yes. But the elect experience none of them, they are not actually made theirs, until they believe.

Gill himself realised it: ‘The sealing work of the Spirit... as illumination, regeneration, sanctification, *etc.*, it is what follows believing... and that none but believers in Christ enjoy the following privilege: “You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of

⁶⁵ Paul, it goes without saying, does not list every blessing accomplished by Christ for the elect on the basis of God’s love in his predestinating decree. He does not include, for example, justification. No! But who would suggest that this is excluded from his triumphant catalogue?

The Principles

promise”’.⁶⁶ Note how Gill here contradicted many other things he stated elsewhere⁶⁷ – as well as putting regeneration after faith. This is an utter impossibility! How can an unregenerate sinner believe? The main point stands, however; only *believers* are sealed. Until they believe, the elect, even though they are elect, are not sealed. ‘In [Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’ (Eph. 1:13). The same goes for all the other blessings in Paul’s list.

Take the believer’s rest. Christ promised rest to all who believe (Matt. 11:28-29). It is as they believe that they ‘enter that rest’ (Heb. 4:3). *They do not receive the assurance, or make the discovery, that they were given this rest in eternity.*

Believers are told to examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5), not as to whether they have the assurance, the manifestation that they are elect and have been justified from eternity. When we believe, we receive what God has promised to his people (Gal. 3:22), not the assurance or feeling that the promise was ours from eternity. Upon believing, we get the actual fulfilment, the experience of it. The point is, until we believe, we do not actually have the promise in experience. Thus it is with justification.

Until they believe, the elect are ‘far off’. It is only ‘by grace... through faith’ that they are ‘brought near by the blood of Christ’ (Eph. 2:8-18). The elect do not become ‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Eph. 2:19-22) until they believe, even though God, in eternity, planned to dwell in his elect, and Christ earned it in his redeeming work. God does not make ‘known’ his ‘manifold wisdom’ to the elect until they believe (Eph. 3:8-12).

As for pardon, as for forgiveness, as for adoption, and so on, so for justification. All were decreed in eternity. All are experienced and made actual by faith in time.

⁶⁶ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p420.

⁶⁷ For a start, see various extracts throughout this present volume.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Consider Hebrews 5:9. Gill got it the wrong way round. Having rightly spoken of the eternal (both past and future) work of salvation by Christ, he went on to say: ‘All those whom Christ saves, he brings to an obedience to himself’.⁶⁸ In saying this, Gill meant that all whom God has decreed to save, all for whom Christ died, God brings to obedience. This is true, I say again. I heartily endorse Gill’s assertion. *But it is not the teaching of Hebrews 5:9.* The verse states that Christ ‘became the author of salvation to all who obey him’. It does not state that ‘all, for whom Christ from eternity was the author of salvation, will obey him’. Yet again, I am not splitting hairs. Gill argued the verse back to front. This is how his system wanted it! He stressed the sovereignty of God, whereas the inspired writer stressed the sinner’s obedience. Christ is the author of salvation, but it is only those who obey Christ in saving faith who are actually saved.

And that is why the unconverted must be commanded, urged and pressed to come to Christ. Until the sinner believes, he is not reconciled. Until the sinner believes, he is not justified. The great and only business of the sinner is that he should obey Christ in the gospel. Let us never forget Christ’s plain statement: ‘He who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16). And: ‘He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ (John 3:18). ‘He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:36). The sinner must believe! The preacher must settle for nothing short of it.

And that brings us to the crux. No sinner can know, no sinner can discover, no sinner can receive a manifestation, that he is elect, justified and guiltless *before* he trusts the Saviour. No preacher can preach for sinners to have this assurance of personal election and justification, and then call them to trust in Christ. Until the sinner believes, trusts Christ, he is not justified. ‘Trust in Christ’, therefore, is the ‘one thing needful’ for every sinner! And longing for sinners to trust Christ must figure high on our agenda as believers.

⁶⁸ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p702.

The Principles

In all this, I stress, we are speaking about *sinners*; not *elect* sinners, but sinners *as* sinners. Irrespective of election, all sinners are born in Adam, and all sinners as sinners are invited and commanded to come to Christ. It is the duty of each and every sinner to repent and trust Christ.

How then shall we best address sinners in the hope of getting them to take that step and trust the Saviour? This is the nub of the matter – addresses to sinners. *This* is the objective I have been working towards right from the start. Throughout these pages, I have kept this vital end in view. I have not been arguing an obscure detail of doctrine for the sake of it. Addresses to sinners. *This* has been my *target*. Addresses to sinners. What can we say to them? What should we say to them? And how should we say it?

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near
Isaiah 55:6

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish
Luke 13:3,5

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in
repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus
Acts 20:21, NIV

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God... Now is the
accepted time... now is the day of salvation
2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:2

Eternal Justification and Addresses to Sinners

As we have seen, we are dealing with two very different views of justification, and, correspondingly, two very different views of saving faith.¹ It will come as no surprise, then, to learn that these two very different systems lead inevitably to two very different ways of addressing sinners with the gospel; the biblical way and the hyper-Calvinistic way.

The biblical way to address sinners with the gospel

In accordance with what we have seen from Scripture, in our addresses to the unconverted we must never forget two things. *First*, that justification follows faith; not the other way about. And, *secondly*, that until sinners come to faith and are justified, they are under the wrath of God. So says Scripture, and says it in no uncertain terms. And these two things are the key to the way in which we must address sinners. Our business is to get them to believe. Not that we can get them to do it, of course, nor can they do it by their own will and power, but our aim must be to persuade them to call upon the name of the Lord and so be saved. Sinners have to believe. We must want them to believe. We must press them to believe. Until they believe, they are under the wrath of God. It is only as they come to believe in Christ that they are actually justified.

Ah! But what precisely do we understand by ‘believe’? What are we aiming for? We are looking for more than knowledge of the facts of the gospel. We are looking for more than mere assent to those facts. What we want is for sinners to savingly believe; that is, to repent, to turn from sin and trust Christ, and to do so from the heart. We want them to be converted. Sinners, therefore, must be urged, commanded and invited to repent of their sin, and trust Christ in order to be justified – otherwise they will perish. This urgent and passionate note must not be muffled. We have to try to

¹ The extracts for this chapter begin on p223.

The Principles

persuade the unconverted to obey the gospel, repent and believe. And do so at once.

So, then, here is our business. When addressing sinners – and when should we *not* be addressing sinners? – our responsibility is to call upon them, *as sinners*, to believe. Until they believe, sinners are not justified, they are not free from condemnation, they are yet under the wrath of God. They must be regenerated and converted. They must come to Christ in repentant, saving faith, and do so without delay. Faith *is* the turning point. Faith is the hinge. Our energy and passion must be directed at sinners to get them to believe. Our sense of urgency must leave them in no uncertainty. We dare not dither. Nor must they. Nor must we allow them to think they can.

The hyper-Calvinistic way of addressing sinners

Because of his view of eternal justification, the hyper-Calvinist, in preaching the gospel, does not call, command, invite, urge or aim to persuade sinners to repent and believe in Christ for salvation. Quite the reverse! He shrinks in horror at the very thought! He thinks that such an approach is utterly out of order, redolent of creature-merit and power, and is a grievous trespass upon the work of the sovereign Spirit! That's not the way!

So how does the hyper-Calvinist approach unbelievers? He divides them into two: the non-sensible and the sensible. And he adopts a very different approach to each group.

In addressing the non-sensible, the hyper-Calvinist presents the facts of the gospel, going so far, perhaps, as to warn them that judgement and eternal condemnation awaits them. He never invites them to come to Christ, he never presses them to come to Christ. Strictly speaking, with his views, he should simply announce: 'The elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded' (Rom. 11:7), leave it at that, and sit down.

In addressing the sensible, as with the non-sensible, the hyper-Calvinist presents the facts of the gospel, but he now goes further; much further. The Gospel Standard preacher, for instance, assures sensible sinners that they are 'blessed' in that they are seeking.

Indeed, he assures them that they are ‘safe’.² Furthermore, he assures them that, if they continue to seek, in due time God will give them a manifestation of their eternal justification, and thereby grant them a comfortable conscience. He does not, however, press them to trust Christ. That would be to trespass upon the work of the sovereign Spirit.

The hyper-Calvinist adopts this twofold approach to the two sorts of sinners, confident that God will bless his elect under such ‘preaching’.

What, precisely, is the hyper-Calvinist expecting? Take the last case first. The hyper-Calvinist is looking for God to give sensible sinners the awareness, the persuasion, the assurance that they are justified by their eternal union with Christ in his death and resurrection. In other words, he is waiting for God to give the elect, as Fuller put it, ‘a manifestation, impression or persuasion in the human mind... a strong impression or persuasion that they were justified’.³ As a result, the Gospel Standard preacher encourages sensible sinners to wait in hope, to read the Bible, to keep attending services and listening to the preacher, assuring those who so wait in this ‘seeking’ state, waiting and longing for this manifestation, that they are ‘safe’ and ‘blessed’ in their seeking. And he assures them that this manifestation will come. In fact, if the preacher and his hearers think about it for a moment or two, sensible sinners must be

² As I have explained, the *Gospel Standard* also castigates those who rightly warn the sensible that they – as much as any sinner – are as yet ‘unsafe’. The Case Study will make everything very clear.

³ See Fuller: *Sermons* p609. I have quoted Fuller here even though he did not attribute this sentiment to hyper-Calvinists. In fact, he attributed it to those ‘who have been far from holding with justification as a decree in the divine mind’. Nevertheless, the sentiment expressed is typical of the hyper-Calvinistic approach to justifying faith. It reminds us, also, that there is a circular element in all this. The further one departs from truth to the left, the more nearly he ends up on its right. For instance, think how the early Brethren movement started. They wanted to break down all institutional barriers between believers. But where has the ‘Taylorite’ wing of the Exclusive Brethren ended up? It would be hard to find a more institutionalised, barrier-ridden, exclusive, inward-looking cult. Baxter’s dictum strikes again! Flying too far away from one error, we end up in the opposite!

actually justified whether or not they trust Christ. As a consequence, the preacher and his ‘sensible’ hearers are happy – ‘blessed’ is the very word – to wait, passive, until God does give them this ‘manifestation’, knowing, meanwhile, that they are ‘safe’.⁴

As for non-sensible sinners, I dread to think what they might take away from such ‘preaching’, what they are supposed to take away with them.

Here, then, we have two distinct views of justification and justifying faith, and, correspondingly, two distinct ways of addressing sinners in the gospel; the biblical way and the hyper-Calvinistic way. Clearly, there is a vast difference between them. Not only that. The hyper-Calvinistic way is wrong. It must be. It is unbiblical! Let me say why.

To begin with, the Bible never distinguishes between unbelievers who are sensible and non-sensible, the elect and non-elect sinner, as far as addressing the unconverted with the gospel is concerned. There is no example of any biblical preacher doing it. Where do we come across any man proclaiming: ‘To those of you who are sensible, I say... but to those of you who are not sensible, I say...’? And that, in itself, hammers a nail into the coffin of the hyper-Calvinistic approach to sinners. Jesus was very clear. Without distinguishing between the sensible and the non-sensible, he declared: ‘Unless you repent you will all likewise perish’ (Luke 13:3,5). Note the ‘all’ and the ‘likewise’. We may say to any congregation, we must say to any congregation: ‘Unless you repent you will all likewise perish’. ‘God... commands all men everywhere to repent’ (Acts 17:30) – all men, elect or not!

Moreover, when addressing unbelievers – sensible or not – all talk about the hearers’ (unbelievers, do not forget) personal interest

⁴ I am not, I hope it is obvious, saying that sinners should not read the Bible or attend gospel preaching. But the idea that this is all we tell them to do, is badly mistaken. What is more, we should never give unbelievers the impression that we are content with their mere attendance, even as so-called ‘seekers’. Because of its importance, I hope to publish on this matter. There is another thing. The practice of unbelievers attending gospel preaching year in, year out: can you find it in the New Testament? It is an ubiquitous feature of Christendom, but the New Testament?

in God's eternal decrees is grossly misplaced. For one thing, it is as though a Mathematics teacher were to instruct five-year-olds in advanced Fourier Analysis or Lagrange Multipliers, leaving it to the university to teach them their multiplication tables. It is worse than that! For a start, the unconverted have no business trying to probe God's eternal purpose – especially about their part and personal interest in them – and preachers have no right to encourage them to do it. In addressing the unconverted, the need is to get them to call upon Christ, not to embroil themselves in a fruitless exploration of God's decree – which, in any case, for them is an audacious exploration of the unknowable. No preacher, and no hearer, can know if a sinner is elect until he has been brought to believe. It is highly significant that whereas Scripture only ever speaks of the justification of believers, when thinking about addresses to sinners, hyper-Calvinists are really concerned about the justification of the elect, the predestined. And it shows! Think of the sort of impression *that* conveys to the unbeliever!

In any case, unbelievers cannot draw near to God on the basis of God's decree of election, or his decree to justify his elect. Nor can preachers invite or command unbelievers to come to Christ on that basis. No, *that* is not the warrant for faith. The warrant is God's universal command in the gospel.⁵ Sinners can only come to God in Christ by trusting the Saviour for their justification. Once again, I am not striving about words. No sinner is justified until he trusts Christ. As far as dealing with the unconverted is concerned, God's electing decree, his decree to justify his elect, those whom the Father gave to the Son to redeem, and so on, is none of their business. Their business is with Christ! 'Christ is all' (Col. 3:11). CHRIST! Trust in Christ is essential. The preacher should not entangle unbelievers in trying to plumb the intricacies of God's decree – he should drive them to Christ, draw them to Christ, shut them up to Christ. His business is to call sinners to repent and trust Christ for salvation, justification, pardon, reconciliation; for everything. The business of the unconverted is to do it! 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31) – saved, justified, pardoned, reconciled, and so on. In other words, the

⁵ See my *Offer*.

preacher has to speak plainly to his hearers, telling them: ‘Until you repent and believe, you are not saved, not justified, not reconciled. When you believe, then, and only then, will you be justified, right with God’. He has to go further. He has to tell them that they are invited to Christ. He must go further still. He must urge and command them to come. He must plead with them to come.

But by stressing, in an unbiblical way, the eternal aspect of justification, and turning it into something it is not – especially when dealing with sinners – the hyper-Calvinist radically and grievously distorts the gospel at this most vital point – most vital as far as it concerns the unconverted sinner.

Let me explain. Under the biblical approach, the sinner is put into the active mode, put on the spot; the ball is firmly in his court. *And he is made to know it and feel it.* Or, at least, the preacher tells him so in the plainest of terms. Although he has no power within himself to comply, nevertheless the sinner has to repent, the sinner has to believe, the sinner has to come to Christ, and so on; otherwise he will perish. And he is told so. More – he is urged to repent and believe at once.

Under the hyper-Calvinist, however, the sensible sinner is put into the passive mode. He is encouraged to wait, hoping some day to be given a manifestation of his eternal justification. Literally speaking, this is dreadfully wrong. No sinner – sensible or not – should ever be encouraged to wait! Moreover, when a sinner does believe, he receives his actual justification, not the assurance that he has been justified from eternity. Under hyper-Calvinistic preaching, it is inevitable that feelings, not Christ, become the foundation of the sinner’s comfort and assurance. And this is fatal!

As for the non-sensible sinner, I dread to think what mode he might be put into under a hyper-Calvinist. By rights, he should come away feeling he is nothing but a robot, created either for salvation or damnation. All he has to do is to eke out his existence until, at last, he enters glory or plunges into eternal perdition. And this is supposed to be gospel preaching?

We must be clear about all this. We must not concede an inch. Sinners are not saved by coming to believe that they are elect, that Christ died for them, that they have been justified from eternity. They may claim to have had a ‘manifestation’ of all that, and be

able to describe all sorts of ‘feelings’ and ‘evidences’, remarkable visions, ‘signs’ and I know not what, fixing on places and times, and all the rest of it, but unless they have come to trust the Saviour, *and are trusting in the Saviour*, they are yet in their sins. They are saved only by believing on Christ.

Again, as believers, we dare not rest content in merely presenting gospel facts and warnings to sinners, waiting for God to awaken his elect among them to the fact that they are justified. And we certainly must never encourage any sinner to linger in such a posture. Which biblical preacher ever told sinners to wait until they were convinced that God had elected and justified them in eternity through union with Christ?

In Scripture, are the unconverted not invariably commanded, urged, exhorted and entreated to repent of their sins and trust Christ? ‘Look to me... Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD... Come to me... Repent, and believe... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ... God... commands all men everywhere to repent... We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God’ (Isa. 45:22; 55:6-7; Matt. 11:28; Mark 1:15; Acts 16:31; 17:30; 2 Cor. 5:20). Are these not the repeated notes of gospel addresses to sinners in Scripture? Is the note not always one of urgency, ‘now’ and ‘today’ (2 Cor. 6:1-2; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:7 – 4:11; 12:25)? Do we ever read: ‘You must wait until your personal interest in God’s secret and eternal decree, and in his Son’s accomplishment of redemption for you as one of the elect, is made clear to you’? ‘Go on waiting – the manifestation will come’?

To sum up: Justifying faith is the soul resting itself upon Christ for salvation. This is what the Scriptures command sinners to do. And this is what hyper-Calvinists fail to command sinners to do. Indeed, it is what they deplore!

What are the consequences of adopting the hyper-Calvinistic way of addressing sinners? For the sinners? For the preachers? Since the biblical pattern has been clearly laid out for us, what will the day of judgement have in store for those who deliberately refuse to follow it, but, instead, follow a pattern laid out for them by their mortal teachers – a pattern without precedent in Scripture?

A man of straw?

Do I hear any reader dismissing all this as a man of straw? If so, my reply is simple. Put me right! Disabuse me! Where, for instance, in the writings or sermons of John Gill, J.C.Philpot, William and John Gadsby, Joseph Hatton, J.K.Popham, J.H.Gosden, Ben Ramsbottom, J.A.Watts or G.D.Buss, and the like, do we find sinners being commanded to believe on Christ to the justifying or saving of their soul? I have failed to discover it.⁶ Rather, I have found time and again where scorn is poured upon preachers who do such a thing. Naturally, I have read only a limited portion of these writers – but if any reader can supply references to show that such men have commanded, invited, exhorted and pleaded with sinners, and tried to persuade them to trust Christ to the saving of their soul and their justification before God, I will willingly retract. As I say, I have failed to unearth it in their writings. But I have come across plenty of evidence to show that such men berate those who do.

The Gospel Standard Articles, I admit, do speak of the elect ‘coming to Christ for salvation’. But what do they mean by this? Gosden, who set out the definitive explanation of the Articles,⁷ more or less restated the words: ‘The Holy Ghost leads the convicted soul to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation’, and then went on to explain what he understood by it: ‘Revealing him in his sacred suitability to the troubled guilty conscience’.⁸

Very well. But this is hardly a ringing endorsement of the biblical call to justifying faith, is it? What is that? It is to address sinners as sinners and call upon them to rest their soul upon Christ.

Sadly, Watts and Buss continued Gosden’s weak approach: ‘Those who are the subjects of the new birth shall assuredly at “the appointed time” be drawn to Christ by the power of the Father and

⁶ But see the forthcoming Study for some *Gospel Standard* teachers getting close, and for evidence of the grievous dilemma in which they are caught. Sometimes they guardedly admit that they timorously contradict their own principles. On occasion, seemingly without realising it, they actually get there.

⁷ Ramsbottom’s ‘Introduction’ to Gosden: *What* vi-vii. See also p7 of gospelstandard.org.uk/gs/media/GS/Articles.pdf

⁸ Gosden: *What* pp46-47.

be brought savingly to believe in him'.⁹ Quite right, of course. Even so, do not miss the passive emphasis in distinct contrast to the biblically active. Moreover, it was unfortunate, to say the least, that they failed to say what they meant by 'savingly to believe', and also failed to spell out what the believing sinner receives. In any case, it is not what the Articles say, it is what and how the preachers preach, and what and, above all, how the hearers believe, which counts.

Furthermore, as I have pointed out, it is significant that the Gospel Standard Articles themselves nowhere state, as the Scriptures do (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5; for instance), that the elect are justified by faith. This remarkable absence – in a Confession of *Faith*, after all – is highly significant, and is all of a piece with John Gadsby's censure of Septimus Sears for his use of 'justified by faith' – wrongly accusing him of teaching 'faith is meritorious'.¹⁰ In fact, Gadsby was really putting Paul in the dock. As I say, more of this in the follow-up volume.

And this brings us back to the crux. Hyper-Calvinistic talk of eternal justification leads them to change the nature of saving faith. Now if we get the 'faith' wrong, who can assure us that we have the 'saving' right? Even though Philpot published (and presumably agreed with) John Cennick who described 'justifying faith' as 'a laying hold on [Christ], and getting his righteousness',¹¹ to hyper-Calvinists, saving faith is not trusting Christ. No! It is coming to the assurance, the manifestation, that I am elect and that Christ died for me, and that I have been justified since eternity past.

It is no use mincing words. This is wrong! Utterly wrong! When the apostle addressed the jailer (Acts 16:31), he did not use the language of Galatians 2:20. It was only after the jailer had believed – had repented and trusted Christ – it was only then that Paul could or would have started to speak about assurance. Of course the *believer* can say: 'The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20), but only after he has obeyed the gospel command and obtained the promise: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and

⁹ Watts and Buss p25.

¹⁰ *Gospel Standard* 1877 wrapper June section D.

¹¹ *Gospel Standard* 1857 p83.

you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). Let me repeat the obvious. The title of this chapter is what we are supposed to be talking about: 'Eternal Justification and Addresses to *Sinners*'. And by 'sinners', I mean, of course, 'unbelieving sinners'. We are all 'sinners' – but I am concerned here with addresses to unbelievers.

And this, I say, takes us back again to *the* issue – how to address unbelieving sinners with the gospel. As for that, we know that Gill was prepared openly to preach that 'all God's elect are justified in his sight, and in his account, before faith; and if before faith, then without it'.¹² What a staggering statement. However carefully it might be guarded, it would not be at all surprising if those who heard it might go home (or, what is worse, into eternity) with a false view of faith. It gets worse. They might even think faith is totally unnecessary. What is more, whatever they deduced from Gill's astounding declaration, they would have seriously misunderstood what it means to be justified. Nor is this an idle deduction. After all, Gill made this alarming statement in a *sermon*.

It can be put in a nutshell. As I have said, the thrust of scriptural gospel addresses to the unconverted puts the sinner onto the active. The sinner has to repent, believe, come, look, call, trust, and so on. Under a hyper-Calvinistic preacher, the sinner is put onto the passive. He has to wait. Scripture, I fully admit, does not minimise the need for the Holy Spirit's power to enable a sinner to obey the gospel, nor the inability of the sinner to comply with it, and this must be made clear in our addresses to sinners. Yes. But *that* is not the overall note to be left ringing in the sinner's ear. Not at all. 'See that you do not refuse... Repent... Believe... Come now... Why will you die?' Is this not the tone of the Bible? Is this overwhelmingly active or passive? That is the question.

Jesus was explicit. He preached both human responsibility and the sovereignty of God, often in the same breath. See Matthew 11:25-30; 22:1-10; 23:37; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 14:15-24; John 5:40; 6:28-29,35-59; 10:26-27; 12:36. And so must we.

Above all, the weight – in addresses to *sinners* – must come down on the human responsibility side. The question is: Is it biblical to tell sinners to repent and believe, or encourage them to

¹² Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp212-213.

linger at the pool hoping that the Spirit will move the water (John 5:3)? Which is it?

Waiting at the pool? What am I talking about? I am, of course, referring to John 5:1-8. The sick would lie beside the pool at Bethesda, waiting for the water to move; and when it did, the first into the water would be healed. Preachers have had a field day with this, finding the episode a rich source of material from which to encourage sinners to keep attending the gospel ministry, waiting, hoping, for something to happen.

Let John Newton – yes, I am sorry to say, John Newton, even though he was no hyper-Calvinist – demonstrate what I mean. As I say, Newton was very far removed from hyper-Calvinism, yet even he succumbed to this unscriptural notion of ‘waiting’. It just shows how fearfully insidious this business is. Listen to him:

*Beside the gospel pool,
Appointed for the poor,
From year to year my helpless soul
Has waited for a cure.*

*But my complaints remain;
I feel alas! the same;
As full of guilt, and fear, and pain
As when at first I came.*

*O would the Lord appear
My malady to heal!
He knows how long I've languished here,
And what distress I feel.*

*How often have I thought,
Why should I longer lie?
Surely the mercy I have sought
Is not for such as I?*

*But whither can I go?
There is no other pool,
Where streams of sov'reign virtue flow,
To make a sinner whole.*

*Here, then, from day to day,
I'll wait, and hope, and try;
Can Jesus hear a sinner pray,
Yet suffer him to die?*

The Principles

*No, he is full of grace,
He never will permit
A soul that fain would see his face
To perish at his feet.¹³*

Or, in another version:

*Beside the gospel pool,
Appointed for the poor,
From time to time my helpless soul
Has waited for a cure.*

*But my complaints remain;
I feel, alas! the same;
As full of guilt, and fear, and pain,
As when at first I came.*

*O would the Lord appear
My malady to heal!
He knows how long I've languish'd here
And what distress I feel.*

*How often have I thought,
Why should I longer lie?
Surely the mercy I have sought
Is not for such as I?*

*No, he is full of grace,
He never will permit
A soul that fain would see his face
To perish at his feet.¹⁴*

What a tragic and misguided application of the passage! Nevertheless, Gill had been of the same opinion. Indeed, he rejoiced in the phenomenon:

A wonderful thing it is, that the hearts of so many unregenerate persons should be inclined to attend upon the outward means of grace,

¹³ *Gospel Hymns* number 633; *Gadsby's Hymns* number 729. There are slight variations in the two versions.

¹⁴ *Gadsby's Hymn* number 729.

and should be waiting at wisdom's gate, and watching at the posts of the door.¹⁵

Spurgeon exploded the nonsense:

This, too... is the thought of many of those who feel their sins and who desire salvation. They accept that unscriptural and dangerous advice given to them by a certain class of ministers; they wait at the pool of Bethesda; they persevere in the formal use of means and ordinances, and continue in unbelief, expecting some great thing. They abide in a constant refusal to obey the gospel, and yet expect that on a sudden they will experience some strange emotions, singular feelings, or remarkable impressions; they hope to see a vision, or hear a supernatural voice, or be alarmed with deliriums of horror... I must... beg unconverted persons not to look for such interpositions... When the Lord bids you believe in Jesus, what right have you to demand signs and wonders instead?... In dealing with the method of waiting to see or feel some great thing, we remark, that it is not the way which God has bidden his servants preach. I challenge the whole world to find any gospel of God in which an unconverted man is told to abide in unbelief. Where is the sinner told to wait upon God in the use of ordinances, that so he may be saved? The gospel of our salvation is this: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved'... 'Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'. And what [is] that gospel? Tell them to wait in their unbelief in the use of means and ordinances until they see some great thing? Tell them to be diligent in prayer... read the word of God...?...

I break off. This is just the sort of direction hyper-Calvinists hand down from the pulpit. And it is utterly out of place. No biblical preacher gave such counsel. Let Spurgeon remind us of the obvious. What is the tone of the sermons we meet in Scripture? Surely this:

'He that believes and is baptised...' This was the gospel, and the only gospel which Jesus Christ ever bade his ministers preach, and they who say, wait for feelings! wait for impressions! wait for wonders! they preach another gospel which is not another; but there be some that trouble you... 'Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth', is God's gospel: 'Wait at the pool', is man's gospel, and has destroyed its

¹⁵ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p640. See my earlier note about the stark difference between the New Testament and Christendom on the question of unbelievers remaining under the gospel for donkey's years.

The Principles

thousands. This un-gospel-like gospel of waiting is immensely popular... because it administers laudanum [opium] to the conscience.¹⁶

Spot on, Mr Spurgeon! As so often, spot on!

Reader, if you are a preacher, are you a dispenser of spiritual laudanum? And if you are a hearer – and are we not all hearers? – have you become a spiritual-laudanum addict, perhaps without being aware of it? Do not forget the parable of the frog and the hot water.¹⁷

The wider audience

Let me make a final point. Although I have used hyper-Calvinists such as Gill, Brine, Gadsby, Ella, Hoeksema, Hanko, along with contributors to contemporary websites, to illustrate what I have been endeavouring to say, and to try to help those who are in bondage under their teaching, and although, in the Case Study, I will be looking into the *Gospel Standard* attack upon Septimus Sears, I have a wider audience in mind. Much wider.

As in all my previous works on the question of addresses to sinners, I am convinced that the problems I have been tackling do not arise only in *stated* hyper-Calvinistic circles. The wider Reformed constituency, I am afraid, is suffering grievously under *incipient* hyper-Calvinism. I have just illustrated this by quoting John Newton. I am not suggesting that those in this wider circle are influenced by eternal justification, but... Just a minute! Let me recast that. I am not suggesting that those in this wider circle are influenced by eternal justification – at the moment. Or at least, I hope not. Nevertheless, the pressure is on. The material is readily available. And Satan is as active as ever.

In any case, many, today, who would deny that they are blighted by hyper-Calvinism, have, in fact, imbibed more of the soporific – Spurgeon's laudanum – than they care to think. Incipient hyper-Calvinism is (to be guilty of a glaring oxymoron) rampant. For instance, many preachers who write and argue vehemently for duty

¹⁶ Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.13 pp195-196 (see the whole sermon).

¹⁷ If a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water, which is then slowly heated, the unfortunate creature will not notice the danger, but will, in time, be cooked alive. The more gradual the heating, the more likely it is that the frog will fail to survive.

faith and the free offer get nowhere near it when they actually climb into a pulpit. Doubtless, even to suggest it will raise hackles. It will, I fear, bring the heavens crashing about my ears. But the times are desperate, times that try men's souls, far more than in Tom Paine's day. Apathy is stifling us, killing us. And apathy can find its way into the pulpit every bit as much as the pew. Sadly, I fear it is too often not merely a case of 'can'! Notice, reader, I did not refer to apathy in the world. That's a given! Apathy in the churches, apathy among believers, apathy among preachers, apathy when actually in the pulpit – that is my concern. Incipient hyper-Calvinism! Feeble – effeminate – addresses to sinners play a not-insignificant part in this. Lectures, not preaching. The reading of virtual (or actual) magazine articles from a Kindle or some other tablet, not preaching. Presentations, not preaching. Dry! Lifeless! Distant! Detached! Boring! Away with it. Away with it, I say, for the love of the hearers – *especially the unconverted!* Who will rid us of this deadening boredom?

I have raised this so many times, my keyboard could almost type the words by itself. But incipient or unwitting hyper-Calvinism still blights the Reformed and evangelical world. It deadens the pulpit. It bores the hearers. It locks the unconverted into a muffled world where they are given a heartless gospel, a passionless gospel, a dry complacency. Stern words! The times call for them! I really do hope that what I have written here will do something to put an end to this appalling state of affairs. For all of us, for preacher and hearer alike, with each remorseless tick of the clock, the reckoning day draws ever nearer.

The Extracts with Comments

‘What is the use of a book’, thought Alice, ‘without extracts?’
With apologies to Lewis Carroll

Here are the extracts I omitted from the main text. I have, where necessary, modernised both spelling and grammar without altering the sense. Much of what follows, I vehemently disagree with; the rest, I strongly endorse. Which is which, I hope, should be obvious.

I have gathered the extracts into some sort of order, but, even so, this section of my book inevitably retains the sense of a collection of disjointed observations. To try to set everything out in order would have taken me back to what I wanted to avoid in the first place; namely, including the quotations in the main body of the text!

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

What is justification?

On justification as a declaration or pronouncement, see Murray: *Redemption* pp119-120; Dabney p620.

Murray: 'Justification is always forensic [a legal term]... It is forensic, and exclusively so... Condemnation is the opposite of justification – the one cannot co-exist with the other' (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp205-206).

Fuller: 'Gospel justification stands opposed to that which is in ordinary use: the one [ordinary justification] acquits the righteous, the worthy, the deserving; the other [gospel justification] acquits the unrighteous, the unworthy, the ungodly' (Fuller: *Appendix to Worthy* p184).

Spurgeon on Rom. 3:24: 'Now, *what is the meaning of justification?* Divines will puzzle you, if you ask them. I must try the best I can to make justification plain and simple, even to the comprehension of a child. There is not such a thing as justification to be had on earth for mortal men, except in one way. Justification, you know, is a forensic term; it is employed always in a legal sense. A prisoner is brought to the bar of justice to be tried. There is only one way whereby that prisoner can be justified; that is, he must be found not guilty; and if he is found not guilty, then he is justified—that is, he is proved to be a just man. If you find that man guilty, you cannot justify him. The Queen may pardon him, but she cannot justify him. The deed is not a justifiable one, if he were guilty concerning it; and he cannot be justified on account of it. He may be pardoned; but not royalty itself can ever wash that man's character. He is as much a real criminal when he is pardoned as before. There is no means among men of justifying a man of an accusation which is laid against him, except by his being proved not guilty. Now, the wonder of wonders is, that [in the gospel] we are proved guilty, and yet we are justified: the verdict has been brought in against us, guilty; and yet, notwithstanding, we are justified. Can any earthly tribunal do that? No; it remained for the ransom of Christ to effect that which is an impossibility to any tribunal upon earth. We are all guilty. Read [Rom. 3:23], immediately preceding the text – "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". There the verdict of guilty is brought in, and yet we are immediately afterwards said to be justified freely by his grace.

Now, allow me to explain *the way whereby God justifies a sinner*. I am about to suppose an impossible case. A prisoner has been tried, and condemned to death. He is a guilty man; he cannot be justified, because he is guilty. But now, suppose for a moment that such a thing

as this could happen—that some second party could be introduced, who could take all that man’s guilt upon himself, who could change places with that man, and by some mysterious process, which of course is impossible with men, become that man; or take that man’s character upon himself; he, the righteous man, putting the rebel in his place, and making the rebel a righteous man. We cannot do that in our courts. If I were to go before a judge, and he should agree that I should be committed for a year’s imprisonment, instead of some wretch who was condemned yesterday to a year’s imprisonment, I could not take his guilt. I might take his punishment, but not his guilt. Now, what flesh and blood cannot do, that Jesus Christ by his redemption did. Here I stand, the sinner. I mention myself as the representative of you all. I am condemned to die. God says: “I will condemn that man; I must, I will – I will punish him”. Christ comes in, puts me aside, and stands himself in my stead. When the plea is demanded, Christ says: “Guilty”; [he] takes my guilt to be his own guilt. When the punishment is to be executed, forth comes Christ. “Punish me”, he says; “I have put my righteousness on that man, and I have taken that man’s sins on me. Father, punish me, and consider that man to have been me. Let him reign in heaven; let me suffer misery. Let me endure his curse, and let him receive my blessing”. This marvellous doctrine of the changing of places of Christ with poor sinners, is a doctrine of revelation, for it never could have been conceived by nature. Let me, lest I should have made a mistake, explain myself again. The way whereby God saves a sinner is not, as some say, by passing over the penalty. No; the penalty has been all paid. It is the putting of another person in the rebel’s place. The rebel must die; God says he must. Christ says: “I will be substitute for the rebel. The rebel shall take my place; I will take his”. God consents to it. No earthly monarch could have power to consent to such a change. But the God of heaven had a right to do as he pleased. In his infinite mercy he consented to the arrangement. “Son of my love”, said he, “you must stand in the sinner’s place; you must suffer what he ought to have suffered; you must be accounted guilty, just as he was accounted guilty; and then I will look upon the sinner in another light. I will look at him as if he were Christ; I will accept him as if he were my only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth. I will give him a crown in heaven, and I will take him to my heart for ever and ever”. This is the way we are saved: “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”.

And now, let me further go on to *explain some of the characteristics* of this justification. As soon as a repenting sinner is justified, remember, he is justified for [*sic*] all his sins. Here stands a man all guilty. The moment he believes in Christ, his pardon at once he receives, and his sins are no longer his; they are cast into the depths of the sea. They

What Is Justification?

were laid upon the shoulders of Christ, and they are gone. The man stands a guiltless man in the sight of God, accepted in the beloved. "What!" say you, "do you mean that literally?" Yes, I do. That is the doctrine of justification by faith. Man ceases to be regarded by divine justice as a guilty being; the moment he believes on Christ his guilt is all taken away. But I am going a step further. The moment the man believes on Christ, he ceases to be guilty in God's esteem; but what is more, he becomes righteous, he becomes meritorious; for, in the moment when Christ takes his sins he takes Christ's righteousness; so that, when God looks upon the sinner who but an hour ago was dead in sins, he looks upon him with as much love and affection as he ever looked upon his Son. He himself has said it – "As the Father loved me, so have I loved you". He loves us as much as his Father loved him. Can you believe such a doctrine as that? Does it not pass all thought? Well, it is a doctrine of the Holy Spirit; the doctrine whereby we must hope to be saved. Can I to any unenlightened person illustrate this thought better? I will give him the parable we have given to us in the prophets – the parable of Joshua the high-priest. Joshua comes in, clothed in filthy garments; those filthy garments representing his sins. Take away the filthy garments; that is pardon. Put a mitre on his head; clothe him in royal raiment; make him rich and fair; that is justification. But where do *these* garments come from? and where do those rags go to? Why, the rags that Joshua had on go to Christ, and the garments put on Joshua are the garments that Christ wore. The sinner and Christ do just what Jonathan and David did. Jonathan put his robes on David, David gave Jonathan his garments; so Christ takes our sins, we take Christ's righteousness; and it is by a glorious substitution and interchange of places that sinners go free and are justified by his grace.

"But", says one, "no one is justified like that, till he dies". Believe me, he is. "The moment a sinner believes,/ And trusts in his crucified God,/ His pardon at once he receives;/ Salvation in full, through his blood". If that young man over there has really believed in Christ this morning, realising by a spiritual experience what I have attempted to describe, he is as much justified in God's sight now as he will be when he stands before the throne. Not the glorified spirits above are more acceptable to God than the poor man below, who is once justified by grace. It is a perfect washing, it is perfect pardon, perfect imputation; we are fully, freely, and wholly accepted, through Christ our Lord. Just one more word here, and then I will leave this matter of justification. Those who are once justified are justified irreversibly. As soon as a sinner takes Christ's place, and Christ takes the sinner's place, there is no fear of a second change. If Christ has once paid the debt, the debt is paid, and it will never be asked for again; if you are pardoned, you are pardoned

once for ever. God does not give man a free pardon under his own sign-manual [the signature of the sovereign], and then afterwards retract it and punish man: that be far from God so to do. He says: "I have punished Christ; you may go free". And after that, we may "rejoice in hope of the glory of God", that "being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ". And now I hear one cry: "That is an extraordinary doctrine". Well, so some may think; but let me say to you, it is a doctrine professed by all Protestant churches, though they may not preach it. It is the doctrine of the Church of England, it is the doctrine of Luther, it is the doctrine of the Presbyterian church; it is professedly the doctrine of all Christian churches; and if it seems strange in your ears, it is because your ears are estranged, and not because the doctrine is a strange one. It is the doctrine of holy writ, that none can condemn whom God justifies, and that none can accuse those for whom Christ has died; for they are totally free from sin. So that, as one of the prophets has it, God sees no sin in Jacob nor iniquity in Israel. In the moment they believe, their sins being imputed to Christ, they cease to be theirs, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to them and accounted theirs, so that they are accepted' (Spurgeon: *New Vol.3* pp156-158).

Again: 'Justification is an instantaneous act. I am perhaps at this moment unjustified. The moment God gives me faith, I become justified; and being justified by faith I have peace with God. It takes no time to accomplish it. Sanctification is a lifelong work, continually effected by the Holy Ghost; but justification is done in an instant. It is... complete the moment a sinner believes... It is irreversible... What glorious peace it brings to a man who first knows himself to be justified!' (Spurgeon: *Pulpit Vol.2* pp67-71).

But we must not minimise the glory of justification. Take the 'made' of Rom. 5:19, 'many will be made righteous. The future tense does not mean that this is something reserved only for eternity to come. Christ accomplished it and it comes to the sinner on believing. As for the 'made' or 'make': 'Debate surrounds the exact meaning of the verb Paul uses here. Some argue that it means nothing more than "make". But this translation misses the forensic flavour of the word. It often means "appoint", and probably refers here to the fact that people are "inaugurated into" the state of sin/righteousness. Paul is insisting that people were really "made" sinners through Adam's act of disobedience, just as they are really "made righteous" through Christ's obedience. This "making righteous", however, must be interpreted in the light of Paul's typical forensic categories. To be "righteous" does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged acquitted, cleared of

What Is Justification?

all charges, in the heavenly judgment. Through Christ's obedient act, people become *really* righteous; but "righteous" itself is a legal, not a moral, term in this context' (Moo: *Romans* p345, emphasis his). 'Justification means our involvement in the obedience of Christ in terms of the same principle by which we are involved in Adam's sin. Nothing less is demanded by the analogy instituted in this verse. Again, the involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal voluntary obedience nor that of subjective holiness. This would violate the forensic character of justification with which the apostle is dealing. But we must not tone down the formula "constituted righteous" to any lower terms than the gracious judgment on God's part whereby the obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account, and therefore reckoned as ours, with all the entail of consequence which righteousness carries with it' (John Murray: *Romans* Vol.1 p206).

Union with Christ

Murray: 'We cannot expound the nature of soteric [biblically saving; that is, gospel] justification in terms simply of what justification is in other instances of its use... No other instance of its use, and not all the other instances of its use put together, can provide us with the distinctive and specific character of this forensic [legal] act on God's part. What is this specific character? It is this, that God's justification of the ungodly presupposes or comprises within itself – that is to say, the action of God denoted by justification of the ungodly – another action besides that which is expressed by our English word "declare righteous", and another action besides that which is denoted by [the Hebrew and Greek] in every other instance of its use. The action is one in which he actually *causes* "to be" the relation which in justification is *declared* "to be". He effects a right relation as well as declares that relation to be. In other words, he constitutes the state which is declared to be. Hence the justifying act either includes or presupposes the constitutive act. This alone will make the declaration to be a declaration according to truth...

We become this righteousness by union with [Christ]. We are made not only beneficiaries of it; we are made the partakers of it to such an extent that we are actually identified in terms of it. It is ours in the sense that our identity is defined in terms of it. Just as Christ became so identified with our sins that, though knowing no sin, he was made sin, so we being in ourselves utterly ungodly, and therefore knowing no righteousness, are so identified with Christ's righteousness that we are made the righteousness of God. In reality, the concept is richer than that of imputation; it is not simply reckoned to us and we are identified with it. Christ is ours, and therefore all that is his is ours in union with him, and we cannot think of him in his vicarious capacity, or of

anything that is his in this capacity, except in union and communion with his people. It is the truth of 2 Cor. 5:21 that brings to fullest expression all that the apostle had said in Rom. 5:17-19 in terms of justification as [the] reception of the free gift of righteousness, as justification of life through the one righteousness of Christ, and so being constituted righteous through the obedience of the one. These are not legal fictions. They are the indispensable implicates of what union with Christ entails. For if we were not partakers of his righteousness, and in that sense identified with it, the doctrine of union with Christ would be so attenuated [narrow, cut down, reduced, shrunk] and vitiated [debased, made ineffective] as to be bereft of meaning and efficacy, not to speak of comfort and assurance...'. 'We are faced here with something completely unique' (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp206-207,214, emphasis mine; *Redemption* p122).

Owen: 'God communicates nothing in a way of grace unto any but in and by the person of Christ, as the mediator and head of the church... Whatever is wrought in believers by the Spirit of Christ, it is in their union to the person of Christ, and by virtue thereof' (Owen: *Holy Spirit* in *Works* Vol.3 pp515-516).

Fuller: 'The Scriptures constantly represent union with Christ as the foundation of our interest in the blessing of justification' (Fuller: *Appendix to Worthy* p183).

Murray: 'Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ... Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation, not only in its application, but also in its once-for-all [time] accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed, the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ, and salvation has in view the realisation of other phases of union with Christ. This can be readily seen if we remember that brief expression which is so common in the New Testament; namely, "in Christ". It is that which is meant by "in Christ" that we have in mind when we speak of "union with Christ"... Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation' (Murray: *Redemption* pp161,170).

Dabney: 'The basis on which this imputation proceeds is our union to Christ... All the benefits we receive in Christ are suspended [depend] on our union with him. It is because we are united [to him], and when we are united to him, that we become interested [that is, personally concerned] in his blood, and righteousness, and in his sanctifying Spirit. But... faith is the instrumental bond of that union. Hence it

What Is Justification?

follows that... justifying righteousness is received by faith alone' (Dabney pp642,645-646).

Calvin: 'Since Christ has been communicated to you with all his benefits, so that all which is his is made yours, you become a member of him, and hence one with him. His righteousness covers your sins – his salvation extinguishes your condemnation; he interposes with his worthiness, and so prevents your unworthiness from coming into the view of God. Thus it truly is... [The apostle, Rom. 8:1] tells us that the condemnation which we of ourselves deserve is annihilated by the salvation of Christ; and to confirm this he employs the argument to which I have referred – viz. that Christ is not external to us, but dwells in us; and not only unites us to himself by an undivided bond of fellowship, but by a wondrous communion brings us daily into closer connection, until he becomes altogether one with us' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp490-491).

This could be put a little stronger. Lloyd-Jones: 'The doctrine of justification by faith does not say that God now regards us as if we were righteous. That is not true, that would be a lie. God cannot regard a man who is unrighteous as righteous. That is not what the doctrine says. What it says is that God imputes [the] righteousness of Jesus Christ to us, puts that to our account, and because of that he regards us as righteous. We have the righteousness of Christ. He sees us in Christ' (Lloyd-Jones: *Atonement* pp173-174).

Calvin again, under the title 'Justification by Faith. Both the Name and the Reality Defined': 'Man's only resource from escaping the curse of the law... may be thus summed up: Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular [this] benefit: ...being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ... A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgement of God he is deemed righteous, and is accepted on account of his righteousness... He... is justified who is regarded, not as a sinner, but as righteous, and as such stands acquitted at the judgement seat of God, where all sinners are condemned... A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous; and we may say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ... To justify, therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved [and to account righteous – DG]. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness,

so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp36-39).

Again: 'God alone justifies. The same thing we likewise transfer to Christ, because he was given to us for righteousness; while we compare faith to a kind of vessel, because we are incapable of receiving Christ unless we are emptied and come with open mouth to receive his grace. Hence it follows, that we do not withdraw the power of justifying from Christ, when we hold that, previous to righteousness, he himself is received by faith... Faith, which is the only instrument for receiving justification, is ignorantly confounded with Christ, who is the material cause, as well as the author and minister of this great blessing'. 'For although Christ could neither purify our souls by his own blood, nor appease the Father by his sacrifice, nor acquit us from the charge of guilt, nor, in short, perform the office of priest, unless he had been very God, because no human ability was equal to such a burden, it is however certain, that he performed all these things in his human nature. If it is asked, in what way we are justified? Paul answers: "By the obedience of Christ". Did he obey in any other way than by assuming the form of a servant? We infer, therefore, that righteousness was manifested to us in his flesh'. 'For, in regard to justification, faith is merely passive, bringing nothing of our own to procure the favour of God, but receiving from Christ everything we want'. 'By the faith of the gospel, Christ becomes ours, and we are made partakers of the salvation and eternal blessedness procured by him' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp43-44,72,280).

Again: 'Christ, with his death and resurrection' effected 'redemption, justification, sanctification, eternal life, and all the other benefits which Christ bestows upon us... He is offered by the promises... that we may enjoy true communion with him. And, indeed, I see not how anyone can expect to have redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, without trusting first of all to true communion with Christ himself. These blessings could not reach us, did not Christ previously make himself ours... In the [Lord's] supper, by the symbols of bread and wine, Christ, his body and his blood, are truly exhibited to us, that in them he fulfilled all obedience, in order to procure righteousness for us – first that we might become one body with him; and, secondly, that being made partakers of his substance, we might feel the result of this fact in the participation of all his blessings' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p564).

Lloyd-Jones: 'The Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin, the Holy Spirit who gives the principle of new life, who regenerates us, who is the

What Is Justification?

same Spirit who, at the same time, joins us to Christ' (Lloyd-Jones: *New* p39).

Spurgeon: 'Let us go a little deeper. That which faith thus realises by coming unto Christ was true before, in a blessed sense... "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus". Why "therefore"? Because they are in Christ Jesus. Therefore there is no condemnation to them because they are in him who can never be condemned... If you are in Christ, there is for that very reason, no condemnation to you... Believers are in Christ *as their federal head*... But Paul [had shown] in the sixth chapter [of Romans] that the saints of God are united to Christ *by a living and vital union*... We are actually one with Christ by living experience... We, beloved, who are in Christ, are justified because Christ is justified by his rising from the dead, and by his taking the position of honour and glory at the right hand of God. He is our representative, and we are one with him, and what he is, that we are. Our union is inseparable, and therefore our condemnation is impossible... Thus, by faith, we are in Christ Jesus' (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.32 pp473-480, emphasis his).

Christ's righteousness

Moo on 'the faith *of* Christ' (Gal. 2:16; 3:22, and so on): 'Critical is the genitive construction *pistis [Iēsou] Christou*... This genitive construction, so it is argued, should be construed not as objective – faith *in* (or directed towards) Christ – but as subjective – the faith *of* (or displayed by) Christ... [Nevertheless,] I continue to doubt that any of Paul's "faith of Christ" phrases refer to Christ's faith. The equivalent verbal constructions ("believe in Christ"), along with contextual shifts from the verb to the noun (*e.g.*, Gal. 2:16), make it far more likely that all these phrases, and shortened version, "faith", refer to [the sinner's] believing' (Moo pp10-11, emphasis his).

Calvin, on Christ as 'the last Adam': 'The work to be performed by the mediator was of no common description: being to restore us to the divine favour, so as to make us, instead of sons of men, sons of God; instead of heirs of hell, heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Who could do this unless the Son of God should also become the Son of man, and so receive what is ours as to transfer to us what is his, making that which is his by nature to become ours by grace?... Another principal part of our reconciliation with God was, that man, who had lost himself by his disobedience, should, by way of remedy, oppose to it obedience, satisfy the justice of God, and pay the penalty of sin. Therefore, our Lord came forth very man, adopted the person of Adam, and assumed his name, that he might in his stead obey the Father; that he might present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to the just judgment of

God, and in the same flesh pay the penalty which we had incurred' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp401-402).

Calvin, on the active and passive obedience of Christ: 'When it is asked then how Christ, by abolishing sin, removed the enmity between God and us, and purchased a righteousness which made him favourable and kind to us, it may be answered generally, that he accomplished this by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by the testimony of Paul: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). And indeed he elsewhere extends the ground of pardon which exempts from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ: "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5). Thus even at his baptism he declared that a part of righteousness was fulfilled by his yielding obedience to the command of the Father. In short, from the moment when he assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance. Scripture, however, the more certainly to define the mode of salvation, ascribes it peculiarly and specially to the death of Christ' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 p437).

Murray on the obedience of Christ, quoted Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9: 'It became [God]... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings... Though he was a Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. And being made perfect, he became, for all those that obey him, the author of eternal salvation'. Murray went on: 'The "being made perfect" has obvious reference to [Christ's] being constituted to perfection as the captain and author of salvation... He was made perfect through sufferings, and learned the obedience from the things he suffered. His obedience was forged in the furnace of trial, temptation and suffering. By these ordeals throughout the whole course of humiliation, his heart, mind and will were framed, so that in each situation, as it emerged in the unfolding of the Father's design, he was able to meet all the demands, and at the climactic point of his commission [the cross], freely and fully to drink the cup of damnation, and pour out his soul in death... Salvation must never be conceived of in design, accomplishment or actual possession, apart from Christ as the Saviour. And salvation is secured by the obedience of Christ, because it was by obedience that Jesus as God-man was constituted the all-sufficient and perfect Saviour' (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp151-157).

THE FOUR ASPECTS OF JUSTIFICATION

Watts and Buss: ‘The church of Christ is justified first in the eternal decree of God, secondly by the blood of Christ, and thirdly by the Holy Spirit when he sovereignly imparts faith in the Lord Jesus’ (Watts and Buss p22).

Goodwin: ‘All these acts of justification, as they depend upon Christ, so [they depend] upon our being one with Christ; and look what kind of union there is, answerable to [that is, corresponding to] the act of justification passed forthwith. [First,] from all eternity, we were one with Christ by stipulation, he by a secret covenant undertaking for us; and answerably [correspondingly] that act of God’s justifying us was but as we were considered in his undertaking. [Then,] when Christ died and rose again, we were in him by representation, as performing it for us, and not in any other way; but as so considered we were justified. But now when we come in our persons, by our own consent, to be made one with him actually, then we come in our persons through him to be personally and in ourselves justified, and receive the atonement by faith’ (Goodwin p139).

Again: ‘Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our head [Christ], as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and interest in him... There is a further act of justifying us, which passes from God towards us in Christ, upon the payment and performance by Christ at his resurrection... And our justification is attributed to his resurrection, not only because he rose again to apply it, but principally in this respect, because at his rising he received it for us, for he being justified [vindicated] then, we were justified in him; and therefore, as justification in respect of the matter imputed is attributed to his death and blood (we were justified by his blood) so the formal imputation of it to us may be ascribed to his resurrection, when the discharge of all was reckoned to Christ... But these two acts of justification are wholly out[side] of us; [they are] immanent acts in God [that is, entirely within God himself]; and though they concern us, and are *towards* us, yet not acts of God *upon* us, they being performed towards us, not as actually existing in ourselves, but only as existing in our head [Christ], who covenanted for us, and represented us... We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is then done [only] when we first believe [and only when we believe]; which act is the completion and accomplishment of the former, and is that great and famous “justification by faith” which the Scripture so much inculcates, and almost only mentions; indeed, and so speaks of it, as if we were not justified at all till then; so 1 Cor. 6:11: “Such were some of you;

but now you are sanctified, now you are justified”; which before they were not; and therefore the apostle speaks of a *now* of justification, being “now justified” (Rom. 5:9); that is, “now we believe” (Rom. 5:1); and so... “By whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom. 5:11), because though it was given in Christ before for us, yet then only we receive it’.

This, said Goodwin, answers the question: ‘How could they be said to be justified before, both from eternity and in Christ, if they may be truly said even in God’s judgement to be justified but now [when they believe], and that they were till now unjustified? The answer is: That these seeming contradictions... are both true’. ‘We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of’ justification ‘when we... believe’ (Goodwin pp135-139, emphasis his).

Manton put forward a view held by some, but with which he disagreed: ‘Since union [with Christ] is said to be by faith (Eph. 3:17)... and faith is an act of spiritual life, it seems there is life before our union with Christ; so that this union seems to be the effect rather than the cause of spiritual life; and some say it is the effect of the beginning, and the cause of the continuance and increase of it, and conceive the order thus: That Christ is offered [to us] in the gospel, and by receiving Christ we come to be united to him, and then to be possessed of his righteousness, and receive further influences of grace; and that the first beginning of spiritual life is not from union, but regeneration, by virtue of which faith is given to us, that we may be united to Christ’.

This was not Manton’s own opinion, however: ‘But I suppose [consider] this method is not right. Briefly, then, for the manner and order of how it is wrought, take it thus: Union [with Christ] is by the Spirit on Christ’s part, and faith on ours; he beginning with us... (1 Cor. 15:45)... By the Spirit he infuses spiritual life, the first act of which is faith; that is the first grace that acts upon Christ, and makes the union reciprocal, so that in him we may have righteousness and grace (Phil. 3:9)... All graces flow from union with Christ; so does faith. Believing is an act of spiritual life, but it is at the same instant of time and not before. The first band of union is the Spirit, for the gift of the Spirit is the cause of faith, and every cause is before the effect in nature, though not in time... The Spirit is not given us in the least moment of time before the being of faith; for the Spirit being infused, immediately excites faith to take hold of Christ’ (Manton: *John 17* pp450-451; see Berkhof pp447-453,510-526).

WHAT IS ETERNAL JUSTIFICATION?

Berkouwer: ‘Eternal justification’ is not a biblical term. ‘We do not need the phrase “eternal justification” or “justification from eternity”’ (Berkouwer p162).

Mason: ‘There is no trace of eternal justification in the early Reformers; not only did they not adhere to the doctrine... the absence of any discussion in authors such as Luther, Calvin, Vermigli, Musculus and Ursinus suggests that it was not an issue for the generations immediately after the Reformation’ (Mason pp30-31). See Daniel pp305-330.

Election and justification confused

Packer: ‘The *Westminster Confession* wards off two... aberrations [of the doctrine of justification]. The first is that justification is from eternity; that is, *before* faith. William Twisse, first prolocutor of the Assembly, had maintained this as part of his case against Arminianism, but, in addition to being unscriptural, the idea is pastorally disastrous, for it reduces justifying faith to discovering that one is justified already, and so sets seekers waiting on God for assurance instead of exerting active trust in Christ. The trouble here was the assimilating of justification to election, and the *Confession* deals with it by drawing the correct distinction: “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect... nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Ghost in due time actually applies Christ unto them”’ (Packer p204, emphasis his; see also *Westminster* p59).

Hyper-Calvinists try to protect free grace

Hyper-Calvinists resolutely argue for eternal justification because they want to protect God’s sovereignty, the freeness of God’s grace, and the certainty of accomplishment of Christ’s redemptive work. Their motive is good, but misguided. Take the *gracious* aspect of justification. Fuller explained: ‘They seem to have supposed that if God justified us before we had any existence, or could have performed any good works, it must be on the footing of grace’. But it will not do the job. Why not? Because, comparing condemnation and justification, ‘these divines [rightly] maintained that some men were ordained to condemnation from eternity; and that, as a punishment for their sin, which God foresaw. But if an eternal decree of condemnation might rest upon foreseen evil, who does not perceive that an eternal decree of justification might equally rest upon foreseen good? The truth is, the freeness of justification does not depend upon the date of it’ (Fuller: *Appendix to Worthy* p183, emphasis his).

In other words, unless the hyper-Calvinist goes the whole hog, and regards sinners as nothing but sticks or stones which God picks up and disposes of at his arbitrary will, thus obliterating all notion of human responsibility, the mere (I am not using the word in a pejorative way) eternity of God's decree to justify his elect does not preserve its gracious aspect. And, of course, if the hyper-Calvinist does go the whole hog, the entire concept of grace is abolished altogether – God acts merely arbitrarily.

Fowler: 'To say... that [elect sinners] believe because they are justified, may superficially magnify the objectivity of the work of God in Christ, but it does so by nullifying the significance of the imperative which accompanies the declarative in the apostolic *kērygma* [preaching]... Paul constantly refers to justification by faith (Rom. 3:22,28,30; 4:11; 5:1; 10:10; Gal. 2:16; 3:8,11,24)' (Fowler pp206-208).

Fuller was precise, and right: 'The Scriptures constantly represent union with Christ as the foundation of our interest in the blessing of justification... Now, faith in him being that by which this union is *effected* [achieved, brought about], hence arises the necessity of it in order to justification. It is that by which, as in a marriage, we are joined to the Lord, and so by his gracious constitution of things are interested in all he is and all he possesses. And thus it is supposed that living faith... is necessary to justification; not as being the ground of our acceptance with God – not as a virtue of which justification is the reward; but as that without which we could not be united to a living Redeemer' (Fuller: *Appendix to Worthy* pp183-184, emphasis mine.)

Again: 'If union with Christ were "acquired" by faith, and an interest in him were bestowed in "reward" of it, it would indeed be inconsistent with free justification; but if the necessity of a holy faith arises merely from the nature of things – that is, its fitness to unite to a holy Saviour – and if faith itself be the gift of God, no such consequence follows; for the union, though we be active in it, is in reality formed by him who actuates us; and to him belongs the praise' (Fuller: *Strictures* p282). That is, of course, the praise belongs to God.

Hyper-Calvinistic statements

The hyper-Calvinist, Hoeksema: 'It should be remembered that objective justification is before faith. Objectively, we are justified regardless of our faith. In eternal election, all those given [to] Christ by the Father are righteous before God for ever, and this righteousness cannot be contingent upon faith even though it is true that we cannot appropriate the gift of righteousness except by a true and living faith... By faith, through the gospel, we hear the declaration of God that he

What Is Eternal Justification?

pronounces us righteous. By faith, therefore, I lay hold upon the righteousness which God, from eternity, has imputed to me' (Hoeksema, quoted by Silversides p66).

On the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the hyper-Calvinist, Hanko: 'Jesus refers to the consciousness of justification. God's elect are eternally justified. They are the elect whom God justifies from before the foundation of the world. But the parable speaks of the consciousness of this blessing of justification' (Hanko, quoted by Silversides p66).

Gill on 2 Cor. 5:17: 'If anyone is in Christ...': 'There is a secret being in Christ from everlasting'. Just so! But that is not the point the apostle is making. In 2 Cor. 5:17, Paul is clearly *not* speaking about this 'secret being in Christ' – God's predestinating decree – but about a sinner's actual experience of conversion. 'From now on... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new' (2 Cor. 5:16-17). From 'now on'. Before they were converted, they were not 'in Christ'; they were in Adam. But from 'now on' – being converted – they are in Christ. 'In Christ', of course, as I said before, is a scriptural phrase big in meaning. The believer is – as [are] all men – born in Adam; upon regeneration leading to repentance, faith and conversion, he is translated out of Adam into Christ (Rom. 5:12-19; 6:1-23; 7:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:20-22; Eph. 4:24; Col. 1:13; 3:10). As a consequence, the unbelieving sinner is unjustified; upon conversion, he is justified. And so on. Not so Gill: 'Faith does not put a man into Christ, but makes him *appear* to be in him'.¹ What a staggering statement. Appear to be in Christ? Whatever next? How wrong can one be? I can hear echoes of the earlier 'as if' – see the body of the book.

Let Gill go on: 'Faith does not put a man into Christ, but makes him appear to be in him...'. Certainly not! Even though he started badly, Gill soon got closer to the right track: 'All such who are secretly in Christ from everlasting [the elect], though as yet some of them may not be new creatures,² yet they [will]³ be sooner or later; and those who are openly [actually] in him, or are converted persons, are actually so' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p308). Gill, of course, was trying to argue it's all a question of appearance. Nevertheless, having gone so far astray at the start of that extract, it is remarkable that Gill got as close

¹ Emphasis mine.

² That is, in my words (DG), they have not yet been regenerated and been brought actually into Christ by faith.

³ Gill had 'should'.

as he did to the biblical position. Indeed, in the end, he got it right! His use of ‘actually’ at the close of the extract is right – and destroyed his case. Until a sinner believes, he is not actually in Christ; after he believes, he is. We are talking about more than ‘appearance’; it is ‘actual’.

Gill was obviously sensitive about the point: ‘I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual’. OK! But, reader, see if you think his reasons make everything clear to you: ‘I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual; though for no other reason than this, lest any should imagine them as transient acts of God upon the elect, which require their personal and actual existence; for otherwise, as I believe, that eternal election is actual, and eternal reprobation is actual, as they are immanent acts in God; so I believe, eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies; and eternal union is actual, as it is an act of God’s everlasting love to his elect, whereby he has knit and united them to himself. I go on to ask, where have I said... that a non-entity was united to an existence?... The elect of God, though they have not an... actual being from eternity, yet they have... a representative being in Christ from everlasting...’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 pp102-103). All such convoluted reasonings and explanations won’t prevent those who listen to Gill, and his talk of eternal justification being manifested to the elect sinner’s conscience, thinking (quite rightly) that his teaching *does* amount to actual justification of the elect in eternity.

Gill again: ‘Justification is an act of God’s gracious will conceived in his mind from eternity, by which he wills not to impute sin to his people, but to Christ their surety; and that they should be accounted righteous through the righteousness of his Son;⁴ in which act of his will, the whole essence of justification in his sight lies;⁵ this was pronounced on Christ, as their head and representative, at his resurrection, when he, as such, was justified, acquitted and discharged, and they in him’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p671). Not at all. The elect are not *actually* justified in God’s eternal decree, in Christ’s death, or at Christ’s resurrection. They are actually justified only when they believe.

Gill: God’s ‘decree and will to justify his people *is* their justification’ (Ella: *Gill and Justification* p102). Not at all! However hard they try, however often they repeat their mantras, hyper-Calvinists like Gill and

⁴ Exactly so. Excellent.

⁵ Exactly wrong. This is *the* mistake. This is not ‘the whole essence’ of justification. There is far more to be said about it.

What Is Eternal Justification?

Ella cannot expunge the *biblical* link between ‘faith’ and ‘justification’. No sinner is actually justified until he believes. Nevertheless, they will go on trying. Ella, commenting on the 1644 Particular Baptist statement: ‘Those who have union with Christ are justified from all their sins, past, present and to come, by the blood of Christ; which justification we conceive to be a gracious and free acquittal of a guilty, sinful creature, from all sin, by God, through the satisfaction that Christ has made by his death; and this applied in the manifestation of it through faith’ (Lumpkin p164). This was Ella’s reading of it: ‘Here we are told *who* the justified are; namely, those who have union with Christ. This would imply that justification does not bring union with Christ, but that justification is given to those who are already united to Christ. According to Article 3 [of the 1644 Confession], this union was established from everlasting by the immutable decree of God, thus answering the question *when*. We also see here *how* this justification becomes the sinner’s; namely, by the sacrificial satisfaction wrought out by Christ on the cross, which is applied and manifested to the sinner by faith’ (Ella: *Gill and Justification* p22, emphasis his).

I draw your attention, reader, to the *when*. Ella was perfectly correct to highlight the eternal nature of justification. The elect are justified in God’s decree in eternity past. But this is not the whole story. And to give the impression that it is the whole story is to make a big mistake, one with large and dire consequences. Yes, *in eternity*, God decreed the justification of the elect. But Christ had to come into the world and die – *in time*, at God’s appointed time (Gal. 4:4-5) – to accomplish that justification. Above all – in the context in which we are talking – the elect are not actually justified until they come to faith. That is what the 1644 stated!

But Crisp (who on this point was hyper-Calvinist) was blunt: ‘It is not believing that justifies. Mark well that phrase: “Him that justifies”. Justification is an act of Christ; it is not an act of faith. But you will say: “It is an act of Christ by faith”. I answer: Then Christ justifies not alone. Is faith Christ himself? If not, then Christ must have a partner to justify, or else faith does not justify, but Christ alone does it. No, I say more; Christ justifies a person before he believes; for he that believes is justified before he believes... But he is first justified before he believes, then he believes that he is justified’ (Crisp Vol.1 p91).

Gill had a note to Crisp: ‘Justification before faith, though cavilled at by many, is certain; since God justifies the ungodly, and since faith is the fruit and effect of justification... and justification took place at the

resurrection of Christ; indeed, from all eternity, as soon as he became the surety of his people' (Crisp Vol.1 p91).

Crisp: 'Some will say [I, DG, certainly do]... faith... is to be understood as the instrumental cause [I prefer 'means'] [of]... justification; and so it goes before the justification of a person'. Crisp disagreed: 'Faith, as it lays hold on the righteousness of Christ, does not bring this righteousness of Christ to the soul, but only declares the presence of it in the soul that was there, even before faith... And therefore faith is not the instrument radically to unite Christ and the soul together; but rather is the fruit that follows and flows from Christ, the root, being united beforehand to the persons that believe; so that the efficacy and power of believing is to be instrumental for the declaration of an act that was done before, only it was hid'. As he had said just before; 'Faith makes the righteousness of Christ evident to the believer (Crisp Vol.3 pp238-240).

Crisp was basically saying that faith is not the *means* of justification, but its *evidence*; or faith brings the evidence. He was wrong. Compare the other way about – condemnation. Are we to understand that unbelievers – by their unbelief – come to realise that they are condemned, are made aware of it in their conscience, and get a manifestation of it? Is unbelief an evidence of condemnation? To the hyper-Calvinist, Casey, it is: 'We must also understand that our believing or not believing does not make us condemned or not condemned. Our believing or not believing only gives evidence of our being condemned or not condemned'.

Crisp was an earnest advocate of actual eternal union with Christ: 'If... believing be a fruit that persons bear by virtue of union to the vine [that is,] Christ, then, it must needs follow, they must first be in him, and then believe; for if persons believe before they are united [to Christ], and their union be by a faith that they act [exercise], then the branch must bear this fruit before it be in the vine, before there be union; and, if faith be the uniter, it is present before the union be made; and so the branch bears fruit before it abides in the vine, contrary to Christ's word (Crisp Vol.3 pp242-243). I leave questions such as whether or not Crisp was making a proper application of John 15, whether or not he was exploring too finely into details which cannot be unravelled, to note that the disputed point involves two issues: union *in God's decree* and *actual union in experience*. They must be kept distinct.

Kendall, in part quoting Crisp and Denne: 'Crisp's main point is that saving faith is the realisation in time of what has already happened in eternity; viz., justification had been accomplished in Christ: "The Lord

What Is Eternal Justification?

has done it already”. Crisp actually holds to a three-tiered justification: (1) eternal justification (the elect were already justified in eternity once God committed himself to lay the elect’s iniquities on the Son); (2) virtual justification (when Christ died and rose again); (3) actual [Kendall went badly astray here, using the wrong word: ‘manifested’ would have been more accurate for Crisp’s position] justification (when the elect in time discover they have already been justified). The discovery that we have been justified already is what Crisp means by saving faith... When Christ applies to our souls what he has done already, he “does but introduce the knowledge of that which the Lord has done before”. Faith is “the conduit pipe through which the Lord is pleased” to convey the knowledge of justification. This knowledge is full assurance... Denne takes the line that “Christ’s righteousness is made ours” by imputation “before the act of our faith, and therefore necessarily without it”... We are... justified by faith “declaratively in our consciences”. Such an act, then, “is a consequent of our justification and not an intercedent [something which comes between us and our justification], since we “must be grafted into Christ Jesus before we can believe”. Faith itself is “beholding the glorious object [Christ], and so we are assured of our justification” (Kendall pp187-188).

Actual justification by faith

James Haldane: ‘In their redemption from the curse of the law, by [Christ’s] being made a curse for them, every spiritual and heavenly and eternal blessing is secured to the elect [but not *actually* theirs – DG]... Believers are said to be justified by faith because, through the truth, Christ takes up his abode in their hearts, communicating to them his Spirit, and thus completing the union begun when he took part with them in flesh and blood; so that, being one with him, they are exalted by his righteousness. This is the ground of the justification of God’s people; it is of faith, that it might be by grace – boasting is excluded’.

Haldane then moved to the timing of all this: ‘Justification... When did this act take place? In time or eternity? Where did it take place? In heaven or on earth? I reply, like every other act of God, it was his eternal purpose; and, like the act of creation, was carried out in time. We may talk of eternal *resurrection* [say], as [much] of eternal *justification*. Both were hid in God; both were equally certain. According to God’s eternal purpose, Christ died in the fullness of time for the sins of his people, and was raised for their justification. His resurrection was the justification of his body, the church; but the members of this body are known only to him; they are manifested in their successive generations, by God giving them repentance to the

acknowledgement of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25). Their relation[ship] to the shepherd is proved by their hearing his voice; by his taking up their abode in them, and dwelling in their hearts by faith. They are, therefore, described as being justified by faith, just as the lame and the blind were healed by faith in the days of Christ's flesh. They were healed by his power, but this power was exerted through [their] faith; in other words, on those who believed' (James Haldane pp115,163,340-341, emphasis mine).

The earlier extract from Goodwin, on 1 Cor. 6:11, bears repeating. Paul tells the Corinthians: "Such were some of you; but now you are sanctified"; which before they were not; and therefore the apostle speaks of a *now* of justification, being "now justified" (Rom. 5:9); that is, "now we believe" (Rom. 5:1); and so... "By whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:11), because though it was given in Christ before for us, yet then only we receive it' (Goodwin pp135-137, emphasis his).

Fee: 1 Cor. 6:11 'is... one of the more important theological statements in the letter... The structure of the sentence seems certain. It begins with three verbs, each introduced by the adversative "but", which gives additional force to the "once you were, but now you are not" emphasis of the sentence' (Fee pp245-246).

Dagg tackled the 'difference of opinion [which] has existed as to the proper date of justification. Some have regarded the day of judgement as its proper date'. Dagg, while admitting that 'God... in the judgement of the great day... will publicly pronounce, on every individual, the sentence that will determine his condition through eternity', nevertheless rightly argued that believers 'are justified in the present life'. He did this from John 3:18: 'He that believes not, *is condemned already*'; and, from 1 Cor. 6:11 and Acts 13:39. How did he do that? It is quite simple. Unbelievers are condemned already – that is what these scriptures teach – unbelievers are condemned already, even though the sentence will be finally passed only on the last day, and they are condemned because of their unbelief. Very well. The corresponding statement can be made, must be made, about justification. Those who believe are justified *now*, though the final sentence will be pronounced only at the last day.

Coming to the notion of eternal justification, Dagg said: 'Some have dated justification in eternity past, regarding it as a grace given in Christ Jesus before the world began'. This is wrong: 'Justification is not a secret purpose in the bosom of God, but a revelation from him, and therefore it cannot be eternal. It implies, not only the accounting of

What Is Eternal Justification?

the sinner righteous, but the declaring of him righteous; otherwise, it would not be the opposite of condemnation; and neither justification nor condemnation can be from eternity. God's purpose to justify is eternal, and so is his purpose to glorify [,yes]; but it is as improper to say that believers are justified from eternity, as it is to say they are glorified from eternity. It is clearly the doctrine of Scripture, that, on believing in Christ, men pass from a state of condemnation into a state of justification' (Dagg pp267-269, emphasis his).

Turretin: 'Although we do not deny that our justification was decreed even from eternity (as nothing takes place in time which was not constituted by [God] from eternity), still we do not think (speaking accurately) justification itself can be called eternal. The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another... The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but actual justification takes place in time and follows faith' (Mason p46).

Spurgeon: 'So far as justification is the result of faith, it is given to the soul in the moment when it closes with Christ, and accepts him as its all in all... The thief upon the cross was justified the moment that he turned the eye of faith to Jesus, who was just then hanging by his side... Now, just as real as the condemnation which justice brings, just so real is the justification which mercy bestows. You are not only nominally guiltless, but you are really so, if you believe in Christ; you are not only nominally put into the place of the innocent, but you are really put there the moment you believe in Jesus. Not only is it said that your sins are gone, but they are gone. Not only does God look on you as though you were accepted; you are accepted' (Spurgeon: *New and Metropolitan* Vol.7 pp113,115).

Dabney: 'The office of faith is simply to be the instrument for instituting the union of the believing soul to [Christ]; so that it may "receive of his fullness grace for grace"' (Dabney p643).

Lloyd-Jones: Rom. 5:1-2 'should read... "we have had our access". In other words, Paul is emphasising that this is something that has happened to us once and for all. There was a time when we did not have this "access". Now, he, says, we have it. How is it that we have it? Because we have had it at a certain point in time, and therefore we have it now. In other words, the translation, "we have our access", does not bring out as it should the fact that there was this critical point, this moment, when we ceased to be outside and we came inside... It is generally agreed, and I am certainly in full agreement, that the better word here would be the word "introduction". It is roughly the same

idea as we have in the word which we use about people being “presented” at Court. That helps to explain the access’ (Lloyd-Jones: *Assurance* pp30-31).

Ridderbos: ‘The basis for the justification is [to be] sought in Jesus Christ, and faith is the means by which man has communion with Christ and shares in his gifts... They [Gal. 2:16]... believed in Jesus Christ *in order to be* justified’ (Ridderbos pp99-100, emphasis mine).

Goodwin: ‘When we are said to be justified by faith, it implies more than a justification in our consciences, and causing us to apprehend our justification; for upon believing there is an act passes from God which makes a real change in our estates, from a state of ungodliness to a state of justification’ (Goodwin pp137-138).

Calvin hammered the nail into the coffin of eternal justification: ‘So long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us... nothing to us until we become one with him... We obtain this by faith’ (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 p463. See Helm p41).

Turretin: ‘So great is the necessity of faith in the matter of salvation that as Christ alone is the cause of salvation, so faith alone is the means and way to Christ. Hence it is celebrated as the bond of our union with Christ because he dwells in us by faith (Eph. 3:17); as the condition of the covenant of grace under which salvation is promised to us, the fruit of election (Tit. 1:1), [and] the instrument of justification (Rom. 5:1)’ (Mason pp28-29).

Davenant: ‘The death of Christ... cannot *actually* constitute any man justified and reconciled unless it be in some way joined, fitted and united to him who is supposed to be justified and reconciled by it... Now we touch Christ by faith and we are joined and... united to him by the Spirit of faith. For “Christ dwells in us by faith”. Without faith, then, or before faith, we have no *actual* union with Christ, and therefore no remission of sins through the merits of his death, no justification, no reconciliation with God the Father. The learned Calvin has observed this on Rom. 8:4: “Christ communicates his righteousness to none but those whom his Spirit unites by a bond to himself”’.⁶ Whatever, therefore, is concealed in the eternal decree of God concerning the justifying and reconciling to himself, and at length

⁶ See Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p283.

What Is Eternal Justification?

saving all the elect, whatever of sufficiency⁷ or efficacy there may be in the precious blood of Christ to redeem men, and reconcile them to God, yet it is not [in God's will] to proceed into the effect of *actual* reconciliation, unless [Christ] is first joined to men by faith... Not one... of the elect stands [that is, *actually*] reconciled and justified before God by the death of Christ, but at the time when he is incorporated with Christ, and by regeneration is made... a member of this mystical head. [Then, and then only] he obtains the righteousness of Christ and peace with God... Christ... does not *actually* justify or reconcile to God any but those who repent and believe... No word occurs in the holy Scriptures from which it can be collected that merely by the virtue and efficacy of the death of Christ... that any man... elect... before repentance and faith, obtains, by virtue of the blood of Christ shed on the cross, remission of sins, or *actual* reconciliation with God' (Davenant pp112-113,115, emphasis mine).

Davenant was right: 'We confess... the eternal will in God of justifying and reconciling to himself all the elect; but we deny that they ought to be said to have been justified or reconciled from eternity'. Davenant illustrated the point: 'In the same manner as we acknowledge that there was in God an eternal will of creating the world, and yet we deny that the world was created from eternity'. If I (that is, DG) may make this illustration personal. God, from all eternity, decreed the day and hour of my birth. But until that hour arrived, I was not yet born, I did not exist. I was not born in eternity. Likewise, God, from all eternity, has decreed the time of my death, but, at the time of writing, I am still alive. I did not die in eternity. Both my birth and my death were decreed in eternity, but the *actual* experiences take place in time. Until my birth day, I was 'unborn'; until my dying day, I am 'undead'. So it is with justification. In eternity, God decreed the justification of his elect. But it is only with their believing that the elect are *actually* justified.

To let Davenant continue: 'We confess... the eternal will in God of justifying and reconciling to himself all the elect; but we deny that they ought to be said to have been justified or reconciled from eternity... It is one thing to choose a person to life before the formation of the world, another thing *actually* to justify and reconcile him to himself before the formation of the world. Election bespeaks [indicates] in God an eternal will of justifying, reconciling and saving the person elected,

⁷ Davenant's notion of 'sufficiency', which I reject, has no bearing on the question in hand. The same applies to Owen's view of the extent of the atonement – which I likewise reject. See my *Particular*.

but of justifying, reconciling and saving him in his own time by faith. Therefore the *actual* justification, reconciliation and sanctification of the person elected, flows from eternal election, but it is not co-eternal with it...⁸ The grace of justification, reconciliation and salvation were *actually* assigned from eternity to all the elect, and... laid up and reserved for them in the treasury of divine love; but it is not rightly deduced that they were *actually* conferred upon them before faith and conversion... Men are transferred into a state of *actual* reconciliation with God, through the death of Christ, as soon as they believe in Christ... “To be reconciled with God” is to be delivered from the guilt of death, to be placed in a state of spiritual life, and to be presented with an hereditary right to eternal life; which things do not belong to the elect merely because they are elected, but when they have been effectually called and converted to God’ (Davenant pp124-129, emphasis his). Davenant argued his case from Rom. 5:10; Eph. 1:4,5,9-10; 2:3-6,8,12-13; Col. 1:21-22; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; quoting, among others, Zanchius, Augustine, Calvin – and Beza: The elect ‘in due time receive wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption freely by faith’. Davenant rightly deduced this to mean that ‘therefore they are not from eternity justified, sanctified or reconciled, although elected and predestinated from eternity’.

Davenant’s implied reference to Rom. 8:30 is highly significant. ‘Whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified’. Note the order. Note the timing. The predestination is eternity past; the calling and the justification take place in time; the glorification is in eternity to come. All three are true! Let me make a comment on the order. I would not stress the order *of the words* over-much. It has been done. But such a practice can backfire. Take 2 Tim. 1:9 and 2 Pet. 1:10 for instance. In that last, the apostle listed ‘calling’ before ‘election’, but nobody, surely, would argue for that literal order. Again, what if certain words are missing in a passage? Take ‘justification’. Neither it, or any of its derivatives, appears in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Peter, for instance. Exegesis must be built on a far better foundation than the ‘accident of words’. Nevertheless, there is a clear sequence in the events. Take: ‘God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which he called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2 Thess. 2:13-14). While I would not for a moment dismiss the eternal aspect of God’s decree in all these ‘truths’ – indeed, the passage establishes the point right at the outset –

⁸ Excellent! Exactly so.

What Is Eternal Justification?

who can seriously question that the ‘believing’ and the ‘calling’ by the preaching of the gospel – in time – will lead to glory in eternity to come?

Clarkson: ‘If... we are justified at the death of Christ... we shall be justified before we believe; indeed, before we have a being; whereas the Scripture speaks of no justification but only of believers; and will have none to be justified but by faith, in no way without or before faith... None are *actually* justified before or without faith... The acceptance of Christ’s obedience... may be considered in two different notions: it was accepted as from Christ, as soon as it was performed, but it was not accepted for us till we believe... Christ’s righteousness is not imputed but to those who believe’ (Clarkson: *Justification* p294, emphasis mine). Scripture only ever speaks of the justification of believers. Hyper-Calvinists, in effect, talk about the justification of the elect, the predestined.

Fuller: ‘It is true that justification, and every other spiritual blessing, was included in the purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but... *the actual bestowment* of... justification [“supposes” its “existence”]’. I pause. Fuller was saying that God could only bestow justification on believers if it had previously been accomplished by Christ. What is more, Christ accomplished justification for the elect, only because God had previously decreed it. Very well. If God bestows justification on his elect as and when they believe, justification must have existed in God’s mind from eternity, and must have been accomplished by Christ. Yes, all that is true. Let Murray explain the point: ‘The existence of the state is presupposed in the declaration of the fact... The relation exists antecedently [beforehand]. In a word, the declaration of the fact presupposes the existence of the fact... The declarative act of God in justification presupposes a constitutive act on the part of God whereby he constitutes a new and upright relation to his law and to his righteousness’ (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp206,210).

To let Fuller continue: ‘Christ was “raised again for our justification”, in the same sense as he died for the pardon of our sins. Pardon and justification were *virtually* obtained by his death and resurrection; and to this may be added, our glorification was obtained by his ascension; for we were not only “quickened together with him”, and “raised up together”, but “made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”. But as this does not prove that we were, thenceforth, *actually* glorified, neither does the other prove that we were *actually* pardoned. Whatever justification is, *the Scriptures represent it as taking place on our believing in Christ*. It is not anything that belongs to predestination, but

something that intervenes between that and glorification. “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified” [Rom. 8:30]. That which the Scriptures call justification is by faith in Jesus Christ’.

Fuller then made a most incisive point. He compared justification and condemnation – a perfectly scriptural thing to do, of course: ‘If justification were God’s decree finally to acquit, condemnation must be his decree finally to condemn. But *every unbeliever, whether elect or non-elect, is under condemnation*, as the Scriptures abundantly teach; condemnation, therefore, cannot be God’s decree finally to condemn. Saul of Tarsus, while an unbeliever, was under condemnation, yet God had “not appointed him to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ” [1 Thess. 5:9]. The sum is, neither condemnation nor justification consists in the secret purpose of God, but in his will as revealed, or declared, by a sentence in open court’ (Fuller: *Sermons* p609, emphasis mine).

Murray: ‘Does justification take place irrespective of any activity on our part? Is justification a judgement and donation given [by God] to sinners dead in sin upon which all saving activity on the part of the justified is consequent rather than precedent? The answer is that while God justifies the ungodly, yet it is only those who believe in Jesus. We are justified by faith... But faith involves some saving response on the part of man and expresses some conscious activity on the part of the person concerned’ (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 p215).

Let me unpack this a little. God accomplished justification in and through Christ in accordance with his eternal decree. This justification, therefore, existed in and after the death and resurrection of Christ. In time, God actually bestows this gift upon his elect – as they, by his grace, trust Christ. But the justification must have existed before they believe – in order for it to be there for God to bestow it upon them. Murray was rightly denying eternal justification. Yes, God has decreed to justify his elect, and yes, God does give justification to them in an act of sovereign grace. But their act of believing is not caused by God’s actual gift of justification to them; it is not consequent upon the bestowal of that gift. I am not playing with words, or splitting any hairs. Faith *is* a consequent action of God’s *electing decree*, yes: God’s decree causes and leads to the elect believing. But God’s actual bestowal of justification upon his elect does not cause or lead to faith. That is to say, faith does not follow the actual bestowal of justification. It follows God’s decree to justify, but not the actual justification of the

What Is Eternal Justification?

elect. Consequently, faith comes between God's decree to justify his elect, and their actual justification. Actual justification follows faith.

Murray, again, this time dealing with 'reconciliation': 'Men come into the possession of reconciliation as *actual* status in [their] response to the gospel proclamation. This is made clear in 2 Cor. 5:18-20... What constitutes this proclamation is that which God has done in the death of his Son, and the essence of the exhortation is that we [sinners] should enter into this status which the once-for-all⁹ accomplishment has secured. In reality, no confidence to draw nigh in the assurance of faith for the appropriation of this grace can be engendered in the hearts of men convicted of sin and of alienation from God except as there is to some extent the apprehension of what God has done in Christ once-for-all to meet the exigency of our¹⁰ sin and of its resultant separation from God. The ground of faith in answer to the exhortation is the reality of that objective accomplishment in the concreteness of the historical event of Christ's death upon the cross. So the distinctiveness of the once-for-all reconciling action in Jesus' blood is not only involved in the ministry and word of reconciliation; it is involved in the very act of faith by which we enter into reconciled status and enjoy peace with God (Murray: *Collected* Vol.4 pp111-112, emphasis mine).

Even the Gospel Standard Articles are clear upon the principle. Really? Yes, it is so. In 1872, Article 9 was amended to read: 'We believe that all those that are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, shall, at the appointed time, certainly be convinced of sin by the Spirit, be brought in guilty before God, and made recipients of eternal life, coming to Christ for salvation, and believing on him...'.¹¹ Quite! 'At the appointed time' – not in eternity – the elect will 'certainly be convinced of sin by the Spirit, be brought in guilty before God, and made recipients of eternal life, coming to Christ for salvation, and

⁹ That is, once-for-all-time. This applies throughout these extracts from Murray.

¹⁰ Murray was not saying the reconciliation is universal. Nor, I am convinced, was he saying that we need to be assured that Christ has died for us in particular before we trust him. Not at all. As I have explained in my *Offer; Particular; Septimus*, that is an utter impossibility. Rather, Murray was saying that a sinner, coming to faith, must believe that Christ can and will reconcile sinners. 'He who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him' (Heb. 11:6).

¹¹ Dix pp302,304.

believing on him'.¹² Until they believe, they are not recipients of eternal life, nor are they saved. *Nor are they justified*. Yet this is contrary to much that their ministers actually teach. Contrary also to that which from time to time appears in the *Gospel Standard*: 'We are in Christ before we know it... Justification is a threefold cord... Experience adds nothing to this... To justify is to make righteous'.¹³ This last mistaken statement is based on a poor translation of Rom. 5:19, and, therefore, a serious misunderstanding of the text. 'Experience adds nothing to' eternal justification? Without experience, no sinner will be saved! As Popham rightly said, when the sinner, by 'the power of God', is brought to faith, 'it effects reconciliation between God and sinners' (*Gospel Standard* 1908 p19). Quite. It 'effects' it, it makes it actual. 'Effects' means 'achieves, produces, brings about, brings into being, makes it happen'. Just so. And, as for reconciliation, so for justification. Until the elect sinner comes to faith, he is not actually reconciled or justified – even though God has decreed and determined both from eternity.

Helm: 'Christ rendered satisfaction for sin on the cross. This satisfaction was procured before anyone now living believed in Christ [or even existed]. But justification is something that takes place in time. Men are justified by faith... Until [an elect sinner] believes, he is not justified, even though Christ has rendered satisfaction for [his] sin. A person is not justified *before* he believes, but *upon* his believing. To suppose, therefore, that [saving or justifying] faith is the knowledge that we are [already] justified is to suppose that it knows something that could not be known' – because our actual justification does not exist, and, what is more, God's eternal secret decree to justify cannot be known by man (Deut. 29:29). 'For it cannot be known that we are justified, until we exercise faith in Christ (Helm pp77-78, emphasis mine).

Conversion

Gill distinguished regeneration and conversion thus: 'Regeneration is the sole act of God; conversion consists both of God's act upon men, in turning them, and acts done by men, under the influence of converting grace... Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner; conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God. In regeneration, men are wholly passive, as they also are in the first moment of conversion; but by it [they] become active. It is therefore

¹² Not merely made sensible of it in the conscience – harking back to Gill above.

¹³ 'Thoughts on Justification' (*Gospel Standard* 1905 pp486-491).

What Is Eternal Justification?

sometimes expressed passively: “You are returned”, or converted (1 Pet. 2:25); and sometimes actively: “A great number believed, and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21)’. Over several pages, Gill argued in detail that: ‘Conversion... is a true, real, internal work of God upon the souls of men... The turn of the heart to God... a turn of the affections of the heart... Conversion is a turn of the mind from carnal things to spiritual ones, and from earthly things to heavenly ones... a turn of the will... They [the converted]... turn their feet to his testimonies... Conversion lies in a man’s being turned from darkness to light... turning... from the power of Satan to God... turning men from idols to serve the living God... turning men from their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ... Conversion lies in a man’s turning to the Lord actively, under the influence of divine grace... Conversion is such an alteration in a man, as is not in his power to effect; it is like that of an Ethiopian changing his skin, and a leopard his spots... Conversion is the motion of the soul towards God’. ‘In redemption’, said Gill, ‘Christ turns away iniquities from his people, by bearing them, and making satisfaction for them; and in conversion, he by his Spirit and grace turns them from their iniquities’ (Gill: *Body* Vol.2 pp292-302). Quite! But eternal justification, in effect, annuls such teaching!

Murray: ‘Conversion is simply another name for repentance and faith conjoined, and would therefore be enclosed in repentance and faith’ (Murray: *Redemption* p87).

Summing up

Owen raised the hyper-Calvinistic argument: ‘The righteousness of Christ is ours before we do believe; for Christ satisfied for all our sins, as if we had satisfied in our own persons. And he who is esteemed to have satisfied for all his sins in his own person is acquitted from them all and accounted just, whether he believe or not; nor is there any ground or reason why he should be required to believe. If, therefore, the righteousness of Christ be really [actually] ours, because, in the judgement of God, we are esteemed to have wrought it in him, then it is ours before we do believe. If it be otherwise, then it is plain that the righteousness itself can never be made ours by believing; only the fruits and effects of it may be suspended on our believing, whereby we may be made partakers of them’.

Owen had his answer ready: ‘The whole fallacy of this objection lies in the opposing one part of the design and method of God’s grace in this mystery of our justification unto another; or the taking of one part of it to be the whole, which, as to its efficacy and perfection, depends on somewhat else. Hereof we [Owen] warned the reader in our [Owen’s] previous discourses. For the whole of it is a supposition that the

satisfaction of Christ... must have its whole effect without believing on our part; which is contrary to the whole declaration of the will of God in the gospel' (Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol.5 pp215-216). Owen went on to set out his reasons.

On Heb. 9:15, Owen argued: 'It was thus conveyed, and is communicated by promise unto all the heirs of it in their successive generations, that the way of obtaining this inheritance on our part might be by faith, and in no other way; for what God has only promised does necessarily require faith unto its reception, and faith only... All our interest in the gospel inheritance depends on our receiving the promise by faith'. That is, until the sinner believes, God's decree and promise is just that. For the elect sinner to receive his eternal inheritance, he must believe. Owen went on: 'Though it be prepared in the counsel of God, though it be proposed unto us in the dispensation of the gospel, yet, unless we receive the promise of it by faith, we have no right or title unto it... The conveyance and actual communication of the eternal inheritance by promise, to be received by faith alone... [is to] "those that are called"... No others are intended but those that actually receive the promise... Effectual vocation [calling] is the only way of entrance into the eternal inheritance' (Owen: *Hebrews* Vol.4 Part 1 pp325-327).

Owen: 'God makes a grant and donation of [what Christ did and suffered] unto believers upon their believing, unto their justification before him... Notwithstanding this full, plenary [complete in all respects] satisfaction once made for the sins of the world that shall be saved, yet all men continue equally to be born by nature "children of wrath", and, while they believe not, "the wrath of God abides on them" (John 3:[18,]36)... Wherefore, on the only making of that satisfaction, no one for whom it was made in the design of God can be said to have suffered in Christ, nor to have an interest in his satisfaction, nor by any way or means be made partaker of it antecedently unto [before] another act of God in its imputation unto him. For this is but one part of the purpose of God's grace as unto our justification by the blood of Christ – namely, that he by his death should make satisfaction for our sins; nor is it to be separated from what also belongs unto it in the same purpose of God. Wherefore, from the position or grant of the satisfaction of Christ, no argument can be taken unto the negation of a consequential act of its imputation unto us; nor, therefore, of the necessity of our faith in the believing and receiving of it, which is no less the appointment of God than it was that Christ should make that satisfaction' (Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol.5 pp210,216-217).

What Is Eternal Justification?

Let me translate. Even though, in eternity, God decreed the salvation of his elect, and gave them to Christ, and, in time, Christ died and rose again for them, the elect are born into this world, and live their lives under the wrath of God – as much as any sinner – until they actually come to faith and receive the justification which God decreed and Christ accomplished for them.

THE SPIRITUAL STATUS OF THE ELECT SINNER BEFORE HE BELIEVES

Hyper-Calvinistic statements

Hyper-Calvinists will not have it that the elect are ever under God's condemnation. Brine, like Gill, grossly glossing the scriptural teaching that sinners are by nature the objects of God's wrath, argued that the elect, before believing, were full of wrath, angry people. Also, he claimed, the law of God – but not God himself – condemns the elect before regeneration. Further, that God merely *threatens* condemnation against the elect. Such a ridiculous interpretation only serves to prove the paucity of Brine's basic argument. How could any teacher think of suggesting that God could be detached from his law? See Jas 2:10-11, for instance. Imagine it – God's law, but not God himself, against the sinner! See Brine.

Grey Hazlerigg, a contemporary of John Gadsby: 'Were not you all naturally children of Adam? Were you not and the wicked naturally bound in the same bundle? and are you any better than they that you should be chosen and they rejected?... You, though born of the same parents as they, and, like them, liable in Adam to the wrath of God' (*Sower* 1871 p364). Did you spot the gloss, reader? Although Hazlerigg was right to note the sameness of the condition of the elect and non-elect in Adam – all are 'wicked... bound in the same bundle' – he was wrong to weaken the biblical position of all men – elect and non-elect – from being *under* the wrath of God in Adam (Eph. 2:1-3), already condemned (John 3:36) – to being merely *liable* to it. The unbelieving elect are not merely deserving of God's wrath (Gill and Brine), nor merely liable to it (Hazlerigg), they are under it, condemned in their unbelief. Condemnation is the consequence of unbelief (John 3:18).

Let me re-quote those contemporary hyper-Calvinistic statements I used in the Introduction: 'I'm not calling on you to believe in order to obtain or gain salvation. I'm calling on you to rest in the fact that Christ has redeemed and justified his elect by his perfect obedience and bloody sacrifice at Calvary as the sin-bearer. If you do rely on him and what he has accomplished, it evidences that you are one of God's elect. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!... The main evidence of this state of lost-ness is unbelief of the gospel... The main evidence of salvation and justification is belief of the gospel... Were God's elect ever condemned? Were God's elect ever charged with their sin? Yes, but only as they were considered in their representative and surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. This sentence of condemnation comes upon all men, all the sons of Adam without exception, even upon the elect of God

themselves; though it is not executed upon them, but on their surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin was never charged to their persons individually apart from being considered in Christ... As we still look at condemnation, let's look at (John 3:18): "He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God". We must also understand that our believing or not believing does not make us condemned or not condemned. Our believing or not believing only gives evidence of our being condemned or not condemned' (Warmack; Parker; Casey).

According to this, whether or not a sinner believes, has no bearing on whether or not he is justified or condemned; faith and unbelief are merely the evidences of the sinner's permanent state – justified or condemned. A remarkable reading of Scripture! Further, while Gill thought the elect *are* condemned in *Adam*, but, at the same time, *are* justified in *Christ*, some modern hyper-Calvinists think the elect *were* condemned in *Christ*, but *are* now justified in *Christ*! Both versions are fantastic!

Hoeksema: 'God beholds his people eternally as perfectly righteous in the Beloved' (Hoeksema, quoted by Silversides p66).

The biblical position

Lloyd-Jones: 'All who are born into this world are under the wrath of God... All men are under the wrath of God, and unless we believe on the Son of God, the wrath of God abides on us. What can be more plain or explicit?... In Rom. 1:18, we read: "For the wrath of God is manifested [is already revealed] from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"... The apostle's teaching... is that until we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we are under the wrath of God... If we die in our sins we go on to eternal punishment... The apostle's teaching is that that is the position of all who are not Christians. They are under the wrath of God in this life, they will remain under the wrath of God in the next life. That is the position of the sinner, according to Scripture... All are under the wrath of God until they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ' (Lloyd-Jones: *God's* pp50-54). True enough – but even Lloyd-Jones failed to stress Paul's point in Eph. 2:1-3; namely, that *even the elect* are by nature like the rest – under the wrath of God; it is only after coming to faith that they – the elect – are no longer under that wrath.

Hodge likewise failed to stress the biblical point (Hodge: *Ephesians* pp103-111). But he did hit the nail on the head over 'children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3). 'The expression "children of wrath", agreeable to a Hebrew

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

idiom... means the “objects of wrath”, obnoxious to [exposed to, deserving of] punishment. Compare Deut. 25:2. “son of stripes”, one to be beaten. 1 Sam. 20:31. 2 Sam. 12:5, “son of death”, one certainly to die... “Children of wrath means simply “the objects of wrath”” (Hodge: *Ephesians* p106).

Before faith, as Plumer put it: ‘God looks upon him [the sinner] as in himself lost, ruined, ungodly, as he certainly is; yet on this ungodly man accepting the Saviour he is justified... Ungodly... is every sinful child of Adam until he believes’ (Plumer p161).

Dort: ‘The wrath of God abides upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Saviour by a true and living faith, are delivered from the wrath of God, and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them’ (*The Three* p38).

In Adam

Lloyd-Jones, preaching on Rom. 5:12-21, speaking of believers, said: ‘We are now “in” the life of Christ. But that at once suggests our *previous* position, and what caused it. The apostle now proceeds to deal with that, and introduces it naturally by the word “wherefore”. He is going to show that we have the same relationship *now* to the Lord Jesus Christ as we *had, before* our salvation [conversion], to Adam. The connection expressed in the word “wherefore” thus becomes quite clear. Having used the expression about our being “in Christ”, Paul now goes on to emphasise that our salvation is not a matter of forgiveness only, but a radical change in our whole position and standing before God. We *are now* “in Christ”, but *formerly were* “in Adam”... All mankind *were formerly* in Adam, but *now* as a result of their justification by faith, believers *are* “in Christ”... Adam was the first man; Christ is the second Man. Adam was the first Adam; Christ is the last Adam. There have only been two heads of the human race; Adam and Christ. There will never be another. And every one of us is either “in Adam” or else “in Christ”’ (Lloyd-Jones: *Assurance* pp175-176,180, emphasis mine).

On the whole, an excellent statement. But I would not put it quite like Lloyd-Jones. He should have been clearer on the eternal aspect of union with Christ. The elect are in Christ from eternity (by God’s decree); they are brought into Christ actually as they are regenerated and come to faith. But, in essence, I agree with what he said. I repeat: ‘Every one of us is either “in Adam” or else “in Christ”’. No man can be in both at the same time. Gill was wrong, utterly wrong. The elect

are not in both Adam and Christ at the same time. The elect, before conversion, are in Adam, but, following conversion, they are in Christ.

Lloyd-Jones again: ‘We are united to Christ, we are “in Christ”, we are parts of Christ. As we were “in Adam”, so we are “in Christ”; not merely in terms of an influence, but of a union, a spiritual union... So let us be clear in our minds that [the apostle] is not dealing with experience, but status, condition, position’. I break off to point out that Lloyd-Jones was treating status and condition as equivalent and interchangeable. As I have said, in everyday speech this is quite acceptable, but at this juncture, we should be talking about status, position, standing, not lifestyle, experience, circumstances. We are talking about justification, not sanctification.

To let Lloyd-Jones go on: ‘*There are only two positions; we are either every one of us in Adam, or else we are in Christ. There is no middle position.* You cannot be a saved man without being joined to Christ, without being in Christ... You are no longer in Adam, you are in Christ... Because I am in Christ, I am in his death, I am in his life, I am in everything that is his... Everything that was true of Adam became true of me because I was in Adam and came out of him. In exactly the same way – only, as [Paul] argued in Rom. 5, “still more” – grace has “abounded”, “super-abounded”. All that is in Christ, and true of him in his relationship to the redeemed, is mine because I am “in him”, and all that he has done and accomplished becomes mine, as all that Adam did and accomplished became mine’ (Lloyd-Jones: *New* pp32-33,39-41, emphasis mine).

With the above-noted proviso, excellent. As is this which I have already quoted from Fuller, but it bears repeating: ‘Every unbeliever, whether elect or non-elect, is under condemnation, as the Scriptures abundantly teach’ (Fuller: *Sermons* p609). Before conversion, therefore, being in Adam, the elect sinner is in a state of condemnation under the wrath of God.

The paradox

Calvin tried to reconcile the seeming paradox between God’s everlasting love for his elect, and yet, before conversion, the fact that they are under his wrath: ‘As there thus arises some appearance of contradiction, I will [try to!] explain the difficulty. The mode in which the Spirit usually speaks in Scripture is that God was the enemy of men until they were restored to favour by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:10); that they were cursed until the iniquity was expiated by the sacrifice of Christ (Gal. 3:10,13); that they were separated from God until, by means of Christ’s body, they were received into union (Col. 1:21-22).

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

Such modes of expression are accommodated to our capacity, that we may the better understand how miserable and calamitous our [that is, the elect's] condition is without Christ... Thus taught, we look to Christ alone for divine favour and paternal love... [But, moreover] mere gratuitous love prompts him [God] to receive us into his favour... "God commends his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)'. Calvin quoted Augustine: 'Accordingly, in a manner wondrous and divine, he [God] loved even when he hated us' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp434-437).

In this way, Calvin had a go at reconciling the two biblical statements – and failed. He might claim: 'I will explain'. He tried, but – naturally – he failed. Of course! All he did was to state the two biblical truths. That is all he could do! God everlastingly loves his elect who, until they trust Christ, are under his wrath and condemnation. God, because he loves his elect, appointed Christ to propitiate his wrath on their behalf, by executing it upon his Son as a vicarious substitute for them. In this way, God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly. But, having said all, we still are left with the seeming contradiction, the antinomy or paradox. The reason is, as so very often in Scripture, God has accommodated himself and his truth to our puny intellect so that we may the better comprehend his love and holiness. So said Calvin. Quite right! But none of this solves the problem. Full marks for trying, even though, I am afraid, Calvin failed to resolve the difficulty. Let me hasten to add that Calvin is not alone. Nobody can cut the knot. I am not being sarcastic! God everlastingly loves his elect, but until they trust his Son, they are under his wrath. And that is that!

God justifies the ungodly

Murray: 'God's... justifying judgement is exercised not simply upon the unrighteous but upon the ungodly' (Murray: *Romans* Vol.1 p133). In other words, the elect unbeliever is in Adam, and is also ungodly in his behaviour. Robert Haldane: 'Men are ungodly in themselves, though, as soon as they are justified, they cease to be ungodly. They are ungodly till they believe; but in the moment that they receive the gift of faith, they are thereby united to the Saviour, and are instantly invested with the robe of righteousness, and also partake, according to the measure of their faith, all those other graces that are received of his fullness... There is not a spark of godliness in any man before he is united to Christ; and [but] the moment he is united to him, he is for ever justified' (Robert Haldane pp165,167). And he is, of course, united to Christ by faith. Calvin: 'Faith unites us to God' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.22 Part 2 p53).

Goodwin: ‘Before faith, the Scripture pronounces the very elect, even those whom Christ died for, “children of wrath as well as others”, till they believe (Eph. 2:3)... God judges and pronounces his elect ungodly and unjustified till they believe; indeed, and by the Spirit of bondage he testifies to their consciences that before faith they are ungodly, unjustified and children of wrath. If it were not a real truth, the Spirit of truth would not evidence this to them’ (Goodwin p137).

In Christ

Owen: In order that God’s plan should be accomplished, the first thing that was necessary was ‘that this righteousness of Christ should be communicated to us, and be made ours, in such a way and manner as that he himself might be glorified therein, seeing he has disposed all things, in this whole economy, unto “the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph. 1:6). This was to be done by faith, on our part. It is so; it could not be otherwise... When the Lord Christ died for us, and offered himself as a propitiatory sacrifice, “God laid all our sins on him” (Isa. 53:6)... Notwithstanding this full, plenary satisfaction once made for the sins of the world that shall be saved,¹ yet all men continue equally to be born by nature “children of wrath”; and while they believe not, “the wrath of God abides on them” (John 3:36) – that, they are obnoxious unto and under the curse of the law’. Again: ‘The Scripture plainly places all men in the same state and condition before conversion and reconciliation (Rom. 3:9,19; Eph. 2:3). The condition of all in unregeneracy is really one and the same. Those who think it is a mistaken apprehension in the elect to think so, are certainly too much mistaken in that apprehension’ (Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol.5 pp214-216; *Death in Works* Vol.10 pp456-457).

Spurgeon preached from Rom 8:1, and it is most instructive to compare his handling of the verse with that of Gill. I have already quoted some of this, but it bears repeating. Spurgeon: “‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus’... Is it possible that a God of love should condemn and punish his creatures?... “There is therefore *now* no condemnation *to them which are in Christ Jesus*”. They would be condemned, every one of them, if it had not been that they are in Christ Jesus: and there is *now* no condemnation to them, solely because they are in Christ Jesus. Their being in Christ Jesus is the great method by which alone they have escaped condemnation... Paul... believed the terrible truth that the impenitent sinner is under condemnation, and believing that truth, he

¹ Here we meet Owen’s view of the extent of the atonement – a totally unnecessary speculation. See my *Particular*.

The Spiritual Status of the Elect Sinner Before He Believes

spoke it plainly... It is a work of almighty and sovereign grace to put men into Christ Jesus: by this method they escape condemnation, but by no other. I understand Paul tacitly to tell us that those who are not in Christ Jesus are under condemnation; and this is a terrible truth. "He that believes not shall be damned" is as much the declaration of our Lord Jesus as that other divine sentence: "He that believes and is baptised shall be saved". As many as believe not in Christ Jesus, and repent not of sin, have before them at this moment "a fearful looking for of judgement and of fiery indignation"... "He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed upon the Son of God"... "He that believes not is condemned already". The sentence has gone out against you if you have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. "*Condemned already*". Think of it, I pray you... There is condemnation for unbelievers, and that condemnation is now. I must also add that to as many as believe not in the Lord Jesus Christ... there is nothing but condemnation so long as they remain in that state. It is written: "He that believes not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him". That is a terrible text'.

How does a sinner get into Christ? I have already dealt with this, but it does no harm to hear it once again – this also from Spurgeon: 'He that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is in Christ. *By an act of simple dependence* upon Jesus he realises [makes actual] his position as being in Christ. By nature I am in myself [better, in Adam], and in sin, and I am, therefore, condemned; but when the grace of God awakens me up to know my ruined state, then I fly to Christ. I trust alone in his blood and righteousness, and he becomes to me the cleft of the rock, wherein I hide myself from the storm of vengeance justly due to me for my many offences. The Lord Jesus is typified by the city of refuge. You and I are like the manslayer who was pursued by the avenger; and we are never safe till we pass the gate of the city of refuge – I mean, till we are completely enclosed by the Lord Jesus. Inside the walls of the city the manslayer was secure, and within our Saviour's wounds we are safe. By a humble, simple, undivided dependence upon him we are placed where we are covered by his merits, and so saved... Judge, then, my hearer, whether you are in Christ. Do you stand before God on your own footing, or do you rest upon Christ, and find your all in him?... Inasmuch as you have believed in him, you are in him. "He that believes on him has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation": these are our Lord's own dear words; treasure them up in your spirits, and rejoice in them for evermore'.

And what does union with Christ by faith mean? This: 'Let us go a little deeper. That which faith thus realises [makes actual] by coming

unto Christ for shelter was true before, in a blessed sense. I understand my text, when it says “*therefore*”, to refer to all that the apostle had argued before in the previous part of his letter; but even if I did not think so, I could understand his *therefore*, for I believe that the text carries its own argument within itself. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”. Why “therefore”? Because they are in Christ Jesus. Therefore there is no condemnation to them because they are in him who can never be condemned... If you are in Christ, there is for that very reason, no condemnation to you... Believers are in Christ *as their federal head*... But Paul [has shown] in the sixth chapter [of Romans] that the saints of God are united to Christ *by a living and vital union*... We are actually one with Christ by living experience... We, beloved, who are in Christ, are justified because Christ is justified by his rising from the dead, and by his taking the position of honour and glory at the right hand of God. He is our representative, and we are one with him, and what he is, that we are. Our union is inseparable, and therefore our condemnation is impossible... Thus, by faith we are in Christ Jesus’.

But once a sinner is united with Christ and is justified, through faith, he has a responsibility and privilege to preach it to others: ‘But go and proclaim the dying love of Jesus; tell them that free grace reigns, and that undeserved mercy saves the sinner through faith in Christ. And that moment he believes in Jesus there is no condemnation to him... “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus”’ (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.32 pp469-480, emphasis his).

WHAT IS JUSTIFYING FAITH?

Why faith?

Spurgeon on Rom. 4:16: 'How is the gospel received? The answer is, by faith... it is of faith... The first reason why God has chosen to make salvation by faith [is] that it might be by grace' (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.23 pp194-204).

Faith brings justification

'If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom. 10:9). And that – the gospel offer – is what we must preach. Calvin said the verse will 'help us understand what justification by faith is, for it shows that righteousness then comes to us when we embrace God's goodness offered to us in the gospel' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p393).

Calvin: 'Justification by faith... Man's only resource for escaping from the curse of the law... may be thus summed up: Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain... being reconciled in the righteousness of Christ' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp36-37). 'We, in our turn, with an unwavering faith, accept of the blessing of adoption that is held out to us' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.20 Part 2 p139).

Dort: 'We are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us, and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when [they] become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins... Relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him... is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror and dread... For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified' (*The Three* p30).

Dagg: 'When the Scriptures speak of justification by the obedience or blood of Christ, faith is supposed; otherwise, those passages which speak of justification by faith would be without meaning. And in like manner, when they speak of justification by faith, the obedience and blood of Christ are supposed; otherwise, it would be unmeaning to say, "justified by his blood" [and] "by his obedience many are made righteous". What Christ did and suffered, and also our faith in Christ,

are necessary to effect our justification... Nothing can be accounted the meritorious cause of justification but the obedience and sufferings of Christ; yet faith is indispensable: "He that believes not the Son shall not see life; and the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). By him all that believe are justified (Acts 13:39). Faith, then, is the turning point, by which a sinner's condition is determined. In God's method of grace, all the benefits of Christ's satisfaction to the law are made over to the sinner, as soon as he believes' (Dagg pp267-269).

Macleod: 'It is through faith as the instrument which lays hold of Christ Jesus as the Lord our righteousness set forth before us in the gospel that believers are justified. No sooner does he draw the first breath of a living faith which receives and rests upon the Saviour as he is thus offered to us in the gospel than the sinner is forgiven and accepted. By his faith he is made one with Christ as his righteousness, and this ensures that his standing is set right as before God. As soon as the knot is tied that unites to the heavenly bridegroom, the change of state takes place; and the one who was until then a child of wrath is accepted in the beloved. This change of state is instantaneous, so that there is no interval of time between the first breath of faith and the removal of penal wrath' (Macleod pp124-125).

What is justifying faith?

Murray: 'The differentiating quality of faith is that the nature and function of faith is to rest completely upon another [person]. It is this resting, confiding, entrusting quality of faith that makes it appropriate to, and indeed exhibit of, the nature of justification... Faith terminates upon Christ and his righteousness, and it makes mention of his righteousness, and of his only... And in resting upon him alone for salvation, it is faith that perfectly dovetails justification in him and in his righteousness' (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp216-217).

Westminster documents: 'Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation' (*Westminster* p165).

Clarkson: 'The object of justifying or saving faith is Christ; it is he by and in whom faith seeks pardon and salvation. For this purpose, to him a believer flies, and on him he leans and rolls himself, to him he cleaves and clings. It is Christ he applies, receives, apprehends and

What Is Justifying Faith?

embraces when he would obtain pardon and life. I should [have to] rehearse [repeat] to you a great part of the gospel if I should allege all those testimonies which the Scripture gives to this truth (Gal. 2:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 9:33; Gal. 3:26; 1 Pet. 2:6; John 3:16,18,36)... The proper and principal object of faith is the person of Christ; not the promise of Christ, not the benefits of Christ, but the person of Christ...¹ Faith is not an assent to a proposition affirmed, but affiance in [a solemn promise in marriage to] a Saviour offered; not [to his] benefits firstly and principally. Faith unites the soul to Christ; it is the bond of our conjugal union. Now, we marry not the dowry, but the person... The person of Christ, with his righteousness, is the formal object... The person of Christ is the principal object... The benefits of Christ are but the secondary objects of faith... We depend not on pardon or salvation, but upon Christ for pardon and salvation; and that not *as having obtained*, but [in order] that we *may obtain* them... Faith at first relies on Christ, not as one that *has pardoned* sin, but as one through whom *pardon is to be obtained*. The persuasion that sin is pardoned is a *consequence* of justifying faith; it is not the justifying act (Clarkson: *Of Faith* pp75-78, emphasis mine).

Manton: ‘What is this act of faith by which we close with Christ? I answer: The apprehending, embracing and taking hold of Christ... (John 1:12), trusting him with our souls; that is the faith which gives us an interest in gospel privileges. But what is this receiving Christ? I answer: receiving presupposes offering; it is a consent to what is offered, and accepting of what is given. Receiving is a word used in contracts, and notes the consent of one part [party] to the terms which the other offers. The Scripture chiefly delights in the similitude of the matrimonial contract. As a woman accepts a man for her husband, so do we receive Christ. When a man’s affections are set upon a woman, he sends spokesmen to tell her of his love, and that he is ready to give her an interest in himself, and all that is his, if she will accept him for a husband. So Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the heir of all things, sends messengers to treat and deal with us about a spiritual marriage, to tell us how he loved us, he gave his life for us, established an everlasting righteousness, whereby we may be accepted with God, and that he is ready to bestow it upon us, if we will receive, and honour, and obey him as Lord and husband’ (Manton: *John 17* pp450-451. See Berkhof pp447-453,510-526).

Owen, having explained the nature of saving faith – that is, receiving, looking to, coming to, fleeing for refuge to, leaning on, rolling or

¹ What a massive statement. How we need to hear it today!

casting ourselves and our burden on, resting on, cleaving to, trusting, hoping and waiting on Christ – said: ‘All that I would infer from these things is that the faith whereby we believe unto the justification of life, or which is required of us in a way of duty that we may be justified, is such an act of the whole soul whereby convinced sinners do wholly go out of themselves to rest upon God in Christ for mercy, pardon, life, righteousness and salvation, with an acquiescence of heart therein; which is the whole of the truth [I have] pleaded for’ (Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol.5 pp290-294).

Owen again: ‘Faith is the cause of pardon of sin; but what cause? in what kind? Why, merely as an instrument, apprehending the righteousness of Christ’ (Owen: *Death in Works* Vol.10 p252).

Fuller: ‘To me it appears a plain and easy matter to ascertain the meaning of faith in [Rom. 4:5]. It is believing; and this believing is counted for righteousness; not as a work, but as the prescribed means of interesting us in the righteousness of Christ. Thus it was common for Christ to say to diseased people, whom he had healed: “Your faith has saved you”. Did he mean by this to make a saviour of faith? No: faith did not cause, *nor so much as co-operate*, in these cures, which were accomplished by his [Christ’s] own power; but it was the prescribed means by which they [the people] became interested [involved, concerned] in the exercise of that power. I use the term “interest” as I do that of justification, not for what we may have in the secret purpose of God, but for that part or portion which we have in spiritual blessings according to the revealed will or promise of God in the Scriptures. The healing efficacy proceeded from Christ, and not from faith; yet without faith they [the people] would not have been healed; and the same may be said of justification’ (Fuller: *Justification* p950, emphasis mine).

Goodwin: ‘I apply Christ when I believe on him that I may be saved, as well as when I believe he is mine, and I shall be saved. In the instance of the man in the Gospel that sold all that he had to buy the pearl, that bargain of his made the pearl his, and did appropriate it to him, for thereby he bought it; and it was not the persuasion of its being his that made it first his, but a selling of all that it might be his, though that persuasion came in afterwards’ (Goodwin pp349-350).

WHAT IS THE HYPER-CALVINISTIC VIEW OF JUSTIFYING FAITH?

Heb. 11:1

‘Faith is the... evidence of things not seen’ (Heb. 11:1). The advocates of eternal justification make much of this text; it is ‘the favourite proof text, which appears time and again’ (Mason p28) in their works. They dwell much upon the word ‘evidence’. In particular, they allege, faith gives the proof, the evidence, of the elect sinner’s eternal justification. Now the word means ‘conviction by demonstration’, even ‘reproof’ (2 Tim. 3:16). Faith teaches us what is true, showing it to us. Gouge: ‘Faith does as efficiently convince the soul of the truth of things that are not seen, as if they were before a man, and he saw them with his eyes’ (Gouge p759). See Brown: *Hebrews* p489; Pink: *Hebrews* pp649-652; Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.22 Part 1 pp260-262; Vincent Vol.2 p1151.

But take Crisp: ‘Faith... serves for the manifestation of that justification which Christ puts upon a person by himself alone: that you by believing on him, may have the declaration, and manifestation of your justification... Faith... is not the condition, without which we receive no benefit from Christ; but rather it is the manifestation of that which is already done and received. Heb. 11:1... A man is justified, and that by Christ alone, but it is not known to him; it is an unseen thing... Faith gives evidence to this thing, faith makes it known; by faith we come to apprehend it;¹ by faith we come to rejoice in it, as we apprehend it to be our own’ (Crisp Vol.1 pp91-92).

‘Faith... serves for the manifestation of that justification which Christ puts upon a person by himself alone’. Gill had a note: ‘For what else can it serve; since it is neither [*sic*] the cause, nor matter, nor condition of justification? At most it can only serve as the hand that receives the righteousness of Christ for justification, and claims an interest in it, and takes the comfort of it; nor does [Crisp] say it serves *only* for a manifestation’ (Crisp Vol.1 p91, emphasis his). If Gill had stuck to saying of faith that ‘at most it can only serve as the hand that receives the righteousness of Christ for justification’, the debate (with him) would be virtually over. As for his drawing attention to Crisp’s lack of ‘only’, Gill, it strikes me, was clutching at straws.

Gill, commenting on, ‘the evidence of things not seen’ (Heb. 11:1): ‘Of things past, of what was done in eternity, in the council and covenant

¹ Crisp did not mean ‘take, take hold of’; he meant ‘understand, become aware of’.

of grace and peace; of what has been in time, in creation, and providence; of the birth, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; of things present, the being, perfections, love of God; of the session of Christ at God's right hand, and his continual intercession; and of the various blessings of grace revealed in the gospel; and of future ones, as the invisible realities of another world: faith has both certainty and evidence in it' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p747). No talk here of faith being the evidence of justification.

Calvin: 'When [the writer of Heb.11:1] calls [faith] the evidence or proof, or... the conviction of things not present... it is the same as if he had called it the appearance of things not apparent, the sight of things not seen, the clearness of things obscure, the presence of things absent, the manifestation of things hid'. Excellent. Now, how can we get this manifestation? 'For the mysteries of God (and to this class belong the things which pertain to our salvation) cannot be discerned in themselves, or, as it is expressed, in their own nature; but we behold them only in his word, of the truth of which we ought to be as firmly persuaded as if we held that everything which it says were done and completed' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 p505). In other words, faith leans upon Scripture, and thus gets the manifestation – from Scripture by faith. The manifestation is not a direct revelation to the mind or soul. The fact is, no man can find a text in Scripture which assures him, *in name, person and in particular*, that God in eternity has decreed his justification, and that Christ accomplished it.

Hyper-Calvinistic statements tested

As Fuller put it, justification is 'by some divines' – Crisp and Gill were such – 'considered' as a 'sentence' (verdict, pronouncement), a sentence 'passing': 'First, in the mind of God from eternity; secondly, on Christ and the elect considered in him when he rose from the dead; thirdly, in the conscience of the sinner on his believing' (Fuller: *Sermons* p609). The first two are right. It is the third which is the problem. There is no issue, needless to say, with the fact that a believer knows and feels the assurance of his justification. But that assurance is not the essence of saving faith.

The hyper-Calvinist thinks 'justification by faith' is the realisation in the sinner's conscience that he has been justified from eternity. So said Gill. He was mistaken. Yet so others have said. Take Gosden: 'It is by faith in Christ that justification is known and enjoyed; yet that faith does not contribute to a justified state'. Gosden was quite right, but he did not go far enough. It is by faith that we are actually justified! Gosden again: 'The enjoyment in experience of justification presupposes an experience of condemnation. Both condemnation and

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

justification are acts of God, and with respect to the elect both are known in this life – condemnation felt in the conscience, the sentence of death there, guilt an intolerable burden there; and, in due time, the removal of the burden, the reversal of the sentence, the remission of sins, and peace with God... When faith is bestowed, the believer feels satisfied with that which satisfies God, and in a measure rests on Christ' (Gosden: *What* pp35-36).

While there is much that is good about this statement, Gosden was showing the hyper-Calvinistic emphasis on conscience and feeling, 'the enjoyment in experience' in 'justification by faith' (even though he failed to use the biblical phrase). But this is not the biblical position at all. Nor was he right about condemnation. A sinner is not condemned because he is conscious that he is condemned. He is condemned, under the wrath of God whether or not he feels it. Millions live and die oblivious of the fact that they are under the wrath of God. Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:3-4). Indeed, many feel that they are right with God! Take the Jews, who retorted to Christ: 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to any man... Abraham is our father... We have one Father – God'. Nevertheless, Jesus told them bluntly: 'You are not of God' (John 8:31-47). Just because sinners feel no remorse, have no sense of danger, and are not concerned about their plight, or, worse, because they are self-confident and presumptuous, it does not mean that they are not in a state of condemnation. Quite the reverse. It is, in truth, a consummate demonstration of their unregenerate state and, therefore, of their being under the wrath of God. And all this was true of the elect before conversion!

And what did Gosden mean by: 'When faith is bestowed, the believer feels satisfied with that which satisfies God, and in a measure rests on Christ'? In a measure? Doesn't he rest himself entirely and only on Christ? This pseudo-spiritual 'meekness' may sound sentimentally sweet to the ears of hyper-Calvinists, but it is, in fact, an abomination. I am not saying that we are faultless in ourselves, but we must knock down the lath-and-plaster talk of resting and believing on Christ 'in a measure'. Once a sinner believes, God constitutes, declares and receives him as righteous as Christ – for that is what he is in Christ! He will never be condemned (Rom. 8:1).

Until the sinner believes, he is not actually justified; it is only when he believes that he is. Not that faith contributes anything to his justification – here I agree totally with Gill and Gosden – faith is not the cause of justification. And I also agree wholeheartedly and unreservedly with the fact that the elect are justified in God's decree

from eternity. But we are talking about a sinner's *actual* justification; and until he savingly believes, he is not justified. Let's cut out the sentimental circumlocution. The sinner who does not believe is condemned. The sinner who trusts Christ is justified.

What did Gosden mean when he said: 'The non-imputation of sin to the sinner, through its having been condemned and atoned for in the person and death of Christ, makes it just in God to impute Christ's righteousness to the unworthy sinner who believes' (Gosden: *What* p36)? Did he mean that, until the 'unworthy sinner... believes', he does not have the righteousness of Christ imputed to him – and therefore is under the wrath of God? – which is biblical. Or did he mean that the imputation of Christ's righteousness took place in eternity to the elect who would eventually come to faith and so enjoy the assurance of the fact of their eternal justification? The latter, I strongly suspect. If not, Gosden was getting close to the biblical justification by faith.

Article 13 of the Gospel Standard Articles: 'We believe that faith is the gift of God... and a manifestation of pardon to the soul'. This is not saving faith!

Let me repeat an extract from the hyper-Calvinist Hoeksema: 'It should be remembered that objective justification is before faith. Objectively we are justified regardless of our faith. In eternal election, all those given [to] Christ by the Father are righteous before God for ever, and this righteousness cannot be contingent upon faith even though it is true that we cannot appropriate the gift of righteousness except by a true and living faith... By faith, through the gospel, we hear the declaration of God that he pronounces us righteous. By faith, therefore, I lay hold upon the righteousness which God, from eternity, has imputed to me'. As for Hanko on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican: 'Jesus refers to the consciousness of justification. God's elect are eternally justified. They are the elect whom God justifies from before the foundation of the world. But the parable speaks of the consciousness of this blessing of justification' (Hanko, quoted by Silversides p66). No!

Fuller: 'The essence of faith came to be placed, not in a belief of the gospel, but in a persuasion of our being interested in its benefits' (Fuller: *Strictures* p257). This is wrong, said Fuller: 'As justification is not a purpose in the divine mind,² neither is it a manifestation to, and

² Not that God did not decree it – but justification is God's constitution and declaration of a sinner righteous through the imputed merits of Christ. It is not merely a purpose; it is an accomplished fact.

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

impression on, a persuasion of, the human mind. That there are manifestations to believers is admitted. God manifests himself unto them as he does not unto the world. The things of God, which are hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed to them. But these are not things which were previously locked up in the divine purposes, but which were things already revealed in the Scriptures, and which were previously hidden from them, as they will be from unbelievers, by their own criminal blindness. God does not reveal his secret counsels to men, otherwise than by fulfilling them. To pretend to a revelation, or manifestation, of that which is not contained in the Scriptures, is pretending to be inspired in the same extraordinary manner as were the prophets and apostles’.

Thus Fuller scored a direct hit. Let me repeat the words: ‘God does not reveal his secret counsels to men, otherwise than by fulfilling them. To pretend to a revelation, or manifestation, of that which is not contained in the Scriptures, is pretending to be inspired in the same extraordinary manner as were the prophets and apostles’.

I will return to this in the Case Study and show how the advocates of the Gospel Standard position are guilty of the very thing which they accuse free-offer and duty-faith preachers of; namely of claiming apostolic powers. We do not. The truth is, they themselves actually claim greater powers than the apostles possessed.

Fuller took the issue further: ‘If justification consists in a manifestation, impression or persuasion that we are justified, condemnation must be a like impression, or persuasion that we are condemned; but this is not true. The Jews who opposed Christ were under condemnation; yet, so far from being impressed, or persuaded of any such thing, they had no doubt but that God was their Father [John 8:41]. Believers in Jesus, on the other hand, may, at times, be impressed with strong apprehensions of divine wrath, while yet they are not exposed to it’. Children of light can walk in darkness, while children of darkness can walk in light; *pace* sermons by Philpot, Spurgeon and others on Isa. 50:10.

Fuller concluded: ‘Neither justification, therefore, nor condemnation, consists in a persuasion of the mind that we are under one or the other. Besides, to make a thing consist in the persuasion of the truth of that thing is a palpable absurdity. There can be no well-grounded persuasion of the truth of anything, unless it be true and evident antecedently to [before] our being persuaded of it’ (Fuller: *Sermons* pp609-610, emphasis mine).

On another occasion, Fuller explained: ‘To me it appears that the distinguishing of justification into acceptance with God, and the sensation or perception of this blessing which a sinner enjoys, has nothing in the Scriptures to support it... A sensation of peace is as distinct from justification as a sensation of wrath is distinct from condemnation. As some are justified, that is, exempt from the curse of the law, and entitled to everlasting life, according to the uniform declarations of the statute book of heaven, while, owing to a cloud upon their minds, they are far from clearly perceiving it; so others stand condemned, that is, exposed to the curse of the law, according to the uniform declarations of the same statute book of heaven, while, through ignorance and unbelief, they have no proper sense of it’ (Fuller: *Justification* p948).

Calvin: ‘Justification by faith... A man will be justified by faith when... he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God, not as a sinner, but as righteous; and we may say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ’ (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp36-38). Note: when we believe, we lay hold of the righteousness of Christ, and so obtain reconciliation in that righteousness; we do not obtain the manifestation that we have been reconciled and justified from eternity.

Murray spelled out what justifying faith is not: ‘[Justifying] faith is not the response of the person to [God’s] justifying act, but is presupposed in [God’s] justifying act, and *this faith is not the faith that we have been justified*, but is rather directed to the proper object [Christ] in order that we may be justified. Justification is on the event of faith, and not faith on the event of justification... The faith in view is not faith in justification [itself], but faith in Christ, the faith directed to him, and commitment to him for salvation’ (Murray: *Collected* Vol.2 pp215-216, emphasis mine). ‘It is true, of course, that there is a faith which is consequent to justification. We cannot believe that we have been justified until we are first justified. But there is good reason for insisting that this reflex or secondary act of faith is not the faith in view when we are said to be justified by faith, and this faith by which we are justified is the initial and primary act of faith in Jesus Christ by which in our effectual calling we are united to Christ and invested with his righteousness unto our acceptance with God and justification by him... When the Scripture speaks of justification [by faith]... it does not refer to our consciousness or assurance of justification, but to the divine act by which we are actually justified. Justification does not consist in that which is reflected in our consciousness; it consists in the divine act of

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

our acquittal and acceptance. And this is precisely what is said to be by faith... The justifying act of God supervenes upon the act of faith... God justifies those who believe in Jesus, and upon the event of faith' (Murray: *Redemption* pp128-129).

Ella staggeringly claimed that Calvin was one with Gill in maintaining 'that faith was the manifestation and ratification of justification' (Ella: *Gill and Justification* p142). Note, once again, the use of 'manifestation', here coupled with 'ratification'. Ella was talking about the supposed revelation to the sinner that he has been actually justified from eternity in God's decree, and justified by Christ dying for him in particular, and that all this is manifested or ratified to him. This, according to Gill, is what Scripture means by justifying faith. It is nothing of the sort! And yet, Gill, according to Ella, was speaking with the same voice as Calvin. Really? I fail to see it. After all, Calvin plainly stated: '[Paul] clearly shows that faith brings us righteousness, not because it is a meritorious act, but because it obtains for us the favour of God... Faith adorns us with the righteousness of another [Christ], which it seeks as a gift from God... God is said to justify us when he freely forgives sinners, and favours those, with whom he might justly be angry, with his love; that is, when his mercy obliterates our unrighteousness' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 pp158-159). Again: 'A man will be justified by faith when... he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous... God of his mere gratuitous goodness is pleased to embrace the sinner, in whom he sees nothing that can move him to mercy but wretchedness, because he sees him altogether naked and destitute of good works. He [God], therefore, seeks the cause of kindness in himself, that thus he may affect the sinner by a sense of his [God's] goodness, and induce him [the sinner], in distrust of his own works, to cast himself entirely upon his mercy for salvation. This is the meaning of faith by which the sinner comes into the possession of salvation, when, according to the doctrine of the gospel, he perceives that he is reconciled by God;³ when, by the intercession of Christ, he obtains the pardon of his sins, and is justified;

³ I am sure that Calvin was *not* saying that it is *after* a sinner comes to the assurance that he is reconciled that he *then* believes. Rather, that after he comes to faith, by 'the doctrine of the gospel' he receives the assurance that he has been reconciled. Unfortunately, as Owen justly observed, the Reformers – and not only Calvin – reacting to Rome, tended to speak more than they should of faith in terms of assurance. In addition, Calvin was ambiguous on the subject. See Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol. 5 pp83-85,96.

and, though⁴ renewed by the Spirit of God, considers that, instead of leaning on his own works, he must look solely to the righteousness which is treasured up for him in Christ... Faith being said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the gospel. By the very fact of its being said to be offered by the gospel, all consideration of works is excluded' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp38,53).

How Ella could claim that this agrees with Gill, I am at a loss to see. Calvin was clear: a sinner, by faith, casts himself on the mercy of God for righteousness and salvation; this brings him into the possession of salvation; then, as he comes to comprehend the doctrine of the gospel, he perceives that he is reconciled to God; and so on. Whatever Ella claimed for Gill, Gill did not teach that!

Incidentally, Ella has not been the only one to mis-read Calvin here. Kendall recognised that Calvin thought that 'faith is... the instrument for receiving righteousness' – which he did.⁵ But he went on to say that Calvin thought faith – 'a "kind of vessel" which transmits the knowledge of our justification... Faith to Calvin may be described as merely witnessing what God has already done in Christ' (Kendall pp19-20) – which is a travesty of Calvin's position. Kendall supported his claim by partially quoting Calvin on John 6:29: 'Faith... is... a passive work, to which no reward can be paid'. But Calvin, there, was arguing that justification is by faith and not by works. He was certainly not teaching, as Kendall alleged, that faith merely witnesses to what God has done in Christ. Let me complete the quote from Calvin: 'Faith... is... a passive work, to which no reward can be paid, and it bestows on man no other righteousness than that which he receives from Christ' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 Part 2 p245). This, it is clear, is far more than 'merely witnessing' to what God has done in Christ! By faith, according to Calvin, a sinner is actually accounted righteous; in other words, by faith he is actually justified.

Kendall, however, rightly noted that Tobias Crisp and Henry Denne taught eternal justification (Kendall pp186-189; see also Helm pp77-79, who included John Saltmarsh. Helm also dealt with Kendall's mis-reading of Calvin on this. Likewise, see Berkouwer pp144-146,148 for A.Kuyper).

⁴ I am sure Calvin meant that, even though the sinner is now regenerate, he still does not trust his works.

⁵ 'Faith... is the only instrument for receiving justification' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p43).

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

As Ella himself noted – and the 1644 is explicit – justification is ‘applied in the manifestation of it through faith’. Or, as Ella expressed it: ‘We also see here how this justification becomes the sinner’s; namely, by the sacrificial satisfaction wrought out by Christ on the cross, which is applied and manifested to the sinner by faith’. In other words, until the elect sinner believes, although he has been justified in God’s decree and Christ’s redemption, he is not actually justified – it is not ‘applied’ (Ella’s word!) to him – until he believes. Quite!

I further draw your attention to Ella’s ‘applied and manifested’. He was, I am convinced, preparing the ground for the hyper-Calvinistic view that when the sinner believes, he does not receive his actual justification, but he receives the manifestation or assurance of it. Take Popham: ‘Justification is a great thing, and if you have faith in Christ and receive a manifestation of his righteousness...’ (Popham p197). This is quite wrong.

Gill: ‘There are some that are justified, as all God’s elect are, in his own mind and will from eternity; which will of his to justify them, upon the righteousness of his Son, undertook by him to bring in, is their justification in the court of heaven; and all that believe in Christ are openly and manifestatively justified in the court of conscience, under the testimony of the Spirit of God’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p381). Gill said this sort of thing time without number. See, for instance, Gill: *Body* Vol.1 pp297-306; Vol.2 pp228-253; and references throughout this present volume; and so on. Let me translate: God decreed the justification of his elect in eternity; Christ accomplished that will of God; and the elect, so justified in God’s decree and Christ’s work, get the manifestation of it when they believe. So said Gill. He was wrong! The elect get the actual experience of justification as and when they believe.

Now there is a world of difference in the use of ‘manifestation’ by, on the one hand, the 1644 (and countless others), and, on the other, by the hyper-Calvinists, Ella, Gill and Popham. Neither side questions the use of ‘manifestation’ in terms of ‘feeling’, but, to the hyper-Calvinist, that is what ‘justification by faith’ means. The sinner, by faith, gets the feeling that he has been eternally justified. The New Testament, however, teaches that until a sinner trusts Christ he is not actually justified but, having believed, he is then constituted and declared righteous by God. The believer then begins to enjoy the sense of his being right with God (Rom. 5:1). According to the hyper-Calvinist, however, Rom. 5:1 teaches that a believer, having been justified by faith – having been given the manifestation, the sense, the feeling, the

felt persuasion, that he was justified in eternity – then gets the felt sense of peace with God. A tautology, if ever there was one.

Let me tease it out. Paul said: ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God’. The hyper-Calvinist, in effect, reads it: ‘Having had the manifestation, the persuasion, the felt sense in the conscience that we have always been right with God, that we have always been at peace with God, then we have (enjoy) peace with God’. Take Gill: Being ‘justified by faith... is a means of our knowledge and perception of our justification by Christ’s righteousness, and of our enjoying the comfort of it; and so we come to have peace with God... The apostle having set the doctrine of justification in a clear light... proceeds to consider its effects, among which peace with God stands in the first place’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p30). Notice how ‘feeling’ and ‘peace’ come into both the *definition* and the *effect* of justification. According to this, ‘justification by faith’ means we have the sense of peace with God. As a result, we have the sense of peace with God. Nonsense! Huge consequences flow from this mistake.

The devastating effect on sinners at the point of conversion

As Fuller pointed out, to argue as hyper-Calvinists do – that saving faith is the persuasion that one is elect and justified – effectively stifles the biblical command for sinners to believe. No sinner can believe – before he has come to faith – that Christ died for him in particular and has justified him. Therefore, on the hyper-Calvinistic scheme, no sinner can ever come to faith. A classic ‘catch-22’! As Fuller observed: ‘Some have maintained that [faith in Christ] consists in a persuasion of our interest in Christ and in all the benefits and blessings of his mediation’. When such preachers address sinners, when all is boiled down, what they really tell them is that they should, ‘without doubting, believe the goodness [echoes of “blessedness” – see the forthcoming Case Study] of their state’ Fuller: *Worthy* pp152-153).

Fuller here put his finger on the important misunderstanding which undergirds the hyper-Calvinistic approach to sinners. Not only do they *not* command unbelievers to trust Christ – which trust is saving and justifying – they encourage their hearers to trust feelings, manifestations, impressions and persuasions instead. And this can lead some to *feel* they are right with God when they are not. And *vice-versa*.

James Haldane: ‘The faith of Jesus is not the persuasion that we are of the elect, or that our sins are pardoned. Neither of these can be ascertained previous to our believing. We are exhorted to make our calling and election sure. The latter can only be ascertained by the former. We are never required to believe anything but what is true,

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

independently of our belief... Faith is the manifestation of election; the two are inseparably connected. We can only know our election by our calling (2 Pet. 1:10)' (James Haldane pp114,157). Excellent! I would add: 'Faith is *not* the manifestation of justification'.

Spurgeon: 'He that believes in Christ is born again'. Let me pause. He did not mean that he who believes in Christ will, following his faith, be born again. No. Only the regenerate can savingly believe. Spurgeon was saying that he who believes has the evidence of his regeneration, gives proof of it, demonstrates it. Let me complete the extract: 'He that believes in Christ is born again. Though as yet he knows it not, the first mark of life is within his soul, for the first sure token of spiritual life is trusting Jesus Christ alone. The best evidence is not trusting marks, signs, evidences, inward feelings, impressions, and so on; but just getting out of that and trusting Jesus. There lies the essence of the saving change – the getting from self to the Lord God in Christ Jesus' (Spurgeon: *Fifty*, taken from *Metropolitan* Vol.27 p706).

Fuller: 'If the attention of the awakened sinner, instead of being directed to Christ, is turned inward, and his mind is employed in searching for evidences of his conversion... [it] may lead him to make a righteousness of his religious feelings, instead of looking out of himself to the Saviour... Believing in [Christ] with all the heart, we *hence*... not in reward of any holiness in us, possess a revealed interest in him, and in all the benefits arising from his obedience unto death' (Fuller: *Strictures* pp257,282, emphasis mine).

Owen, speaking about regeneration: 'An assurance of being regenerate is in no way previously necessary unto the believing of an interest in forgiveness; so that although a man may not have the former, it is, or may be, his duty to endeavour the latter'. I pause. Nobody can have any assurance that they are regenerate until they believe! And it is the duty of all sinners – whether regenerate or regenerate – to believe! Owen: 'When convinced persons cried out: "What shall we do to be saved?" the answer was: "Believe, and you shall be so". "Believe in Christ, and the remission of sin by his blood", is the first thing that convinced sinners are called unto. They are not directed first to secure [convince, prove, make sure] their souls that they are born again, and then afterward to believe; but they are first to believe that the remission of sin is tendered unto them in the blood of Christ, and that "by him they may be justified..."'. Nor upon this proposition is it the duty of men to question whether they have faith or not, but actually to believe. And faith in its operation will evidence itself. See Acts 13:38-39. Suppose, then, that you do not know that you are regenerate – that you have no prevailing, refreshing, constant evidence or persuasion thereof

– should this hinder you? Should this discourage you from believing forgiveness, from closing with the promises, and thereby obtaining in yourselves an interest in that forgiveness that is with God? Not at all; indeed, this ought exceedingly to excite and stir you up to your duty herein’. Owen gave his reasons. Nevertheless, as I have already indicated, Owen was making a mistake by ‘playing the hyper-Calvinistic game’. Rather, he should have dismissed the nonsense for what it is. No sinner can know he is elect, regenerate, justified, in God’s decree, until he has come to faith. Nevertheless, Owen’s point was excellent. As was his conclusion: ‘Remember that that which has been spoken with reference to the state of regeneration in general may be applied to every particular objection or cause of fear and discouragement that may be reduced to that head’ (Owen: *Psalm 130* in *Works* Vol.6 pp597-599).

Yes, indeed; and for my purpose, all this may be, should be, applied to the knowledge of God’s decree to justify. So let’s do it. Now let me paraphrase and apply those words to God’s eternal decree to justify the elect: ‘An assurance of being *elect and justified in God’s decree* is in no way previously necessary unto the believing of an interest in forgiveness; so that although a man may not have the former, it is, or may be, his duty to endeavour the latter. When convinced persons cried out: “What shall we do to be saved?” the answer was: “Believe, and you shall be so”. “Believe in Christ, and the remission of sin by his blood”, is the first thing that convinced sinners are called unto. They are not directed first to secure their souls that they are *elect and justified in God’s decree*, and then afterward to believe; but they are first to believe that the remission of sin is tendered unto them in the blood of Christ, and that “by him they may be justified...”. Nor upon this proposition is it the duty of men to question whether they have faith or not, but actually to believe. And faith in its operation will evidence itself. See Acts 13:38-39. Suppose, then, that you do not know that you are *elect and justified in God’s decree* – that you have no prevailing, refreshing, constant evidence or persuasion thereof – should this hinder you? Should this discourage you from believing forgiveness, from closing with the promises, and thereby obtaining in yourselves an interest in that forgiveness that is with God? Not at all; indeed, this ought exceedingly to excite and stir you up to your duty herein’.

Justification and comfort

Calvin certainly saw a sinner’s comfort arising out of and after his justification by faith: ‘Miserable souls... are rendered quiet and tranquil, *when* [they] have obtained the righteousness by faith’ (Calvin:

What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?

Commentaries Vol.19 Part 2 p187, emphasis mine). Until they believe, sinners have no comfort and peace. The reason is, until they believe, they are not justified. Until they believe, they should have no peace. They are not ‘safe’.

As Lloyd-Jones said, Paul here (in Rom. 5:1): ‘Deals with the first *consequence* of justification... “We have peace with God”... God has sent his Son into the world, and has “set him forth” as a “propitiation” for our sins. This means that he laid our sins upon him, and poured out his wrath against sins upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only because he has done that, that God can look upon us with favour, and pardon and forgive us and reconcile us unto himself. This had to happen before the wrath of God could be appeased and he could look upon us and deal with us in a new way. The apostle asserts here that, in the light of what has happened in Christ, who was “delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification”, as far as peace with God is concerned, the wrath is no longer there, and he is at peace with all “that believe in Jesus”’.

I break off to stress this. God is at peace with all who believe – not with all who are in eternal union with Christ and justified in eternity but as yet are unbelieving. Let me say it again. God is at peace with all that believe and are justified. He is not at peace with those whom he has decreed to justify, but who as yet do not believe. Until they come to saving faith, even the elect (as others – Eph. 2:1-3) are under the wrath of God. Until a sinner believes he, like all unbelievers, comes under the sentence of John 3:36: ‘He who does not believe... the wrath of God abides on him’. To let Lloyd-Jones continue: ‘The apostle asserts here that, in the light of what has happened in Christ, who was “delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification”, as far as peace with God is concerned, the wrath is no longer there, and he [God] is at peace with all “that believe in Jesus”. But it was necessary also that something should happen from our side... *Because* we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God... “Being justified – having been justified – by faith, we have peace”’ (Lloyd-Jones: *Assurance* pp7,15,17, emphasis mine). We have to believe in order to be justified.

Clarkson: ‘The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and not only the effects of it’ (Clarkson: *Justification* p294). Just so. And one of the effects of justification is comfort through assurance. But in ‘justification by faith’ we are talking about the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and the consequent justification of the one who believes (Rom. 3:22; 4:5; 9:30; 10:10; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 11:7), *not the sense of*

God having accomplished his decree to impute Christ's righteousness to him as an elect sinner, and so justify him.

Summing up

Owen hit the nail on the head: 'Salvation is confined to believers; and those who look for salvation by Christ, must secure it unto themselves by faith and obedience. It is Christ alone who is the cause of our salvation, but he will save none but those who obey him. He came to save sinners, but not such as choose to continue in their sins; though the gospel is full of love, of grace, of mercy and pardon, yet herein the sentence of it is peremptory and decretory [decreed]: "He that believes not shall be damned"' (Owen: *Hebrews* Vol. 3 Part 1 p540).

Calvin: 'Our faith ought to be directed to Christ alone, that it may not wander through long windings; and that it ought to be fixed on him' (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.18 Part 1 p81). Fixed on Christ, not feelings; fixed on Christ, not manifestations.

ETERNAL JUSTIFICATION AND ADDRESSES TO SINNERS

The Gospel Standard Articles: ‘We believe that faith is the gift of God, as well as true spiritual repentance and hope, and a manifestation of pardon to the soul... We believe that the invitations of the gospel, being spirit and life, are intended only for those who have been made by the blessed Spirit to feel their lost state as sinners and their need of Christ as their Saviour, and to repent of and forsake their sins... We reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God... When a man is quickened by the blessed Spirit, he has faith given him to know and feel that he is a sinner against God, and that without a Saviour he must sink in black despair. And we further believe that such a man will be made to cry for mercy, to mourn over and on account of his sins, and, being made to feel that he has no righteousness of his own, to hunger and thirst after Christ’s righteousness; being led on by the Spirit until, in the full assurance of faith, he has the Spirit’s witness in his heart that his sins are for ever put away’.

Whether or not this is a clear endorsement of the scriptural teaching on conversion, I leave it to you, reader, to decide. I have no doubts myself.

Spurgeon on Rom. 4:16: ‘I met with a remark the other day that even the evangelical pulpit needs to be evangelised; I am afraid it is too true, and therefore we will give such prominence to the gospel, and to its central doctrine of justification by faith, that no such remark shall be applicable to us. We have heard it said that if an instrument could be invented which would serve the same purpose towards sermons as the lactometer does towards milk, you would with great difficulty be able to discover any trace of the unadulterated milk of the word in large numbers of modern discourses... The gospel is always wanted’ (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.23 p193).

What, precisely, are sinners to be told in preaching the gospel? Murray spelled out what is *not* to be said to them. With reference to reconciliation, for example: ‘The significance of the message [of the gospel], of the [gospel] exhortation, and of the response in faith, should warn us against the distortion so prevalent that the *kērygma* [preaching] consists in the announcement to all men that they have been reconciled, and that faith consists in the acceptance of this as a fact’.

Quite. This is wrong on two counts. First, in that Christ did not die for, and reconcile, all men without exception. In addition, trusting Christ is far more than accepting facts. I will have much more to say on this in

my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism. Murray went on: ‘It is all-important and most significant that the exhortation correspondent with the message is: “Be reconciled to God”, an exhortation which surely implies that reconciliation as a status, as one of peace with God, does not take effect until there is the response of faith’ (Murray: *Collected* Vol.4 pp111-112). In other words, Christ died to accomplish reconciliation, but in gospel preaching we must command sinners to be reconciled to God. They must believe in order to be reconciled. The same goes for justification (and pardon, and forgiveness, and so on). God decreed it. Christ accomplished it. Preachers must demand faith. Until sinners believe, they are not actually justified (pardoned, forgiven, and so on).

And the need is urgent. Spurgeon: ‘He who does not take the step of faith, and so enter upon the road to heaven, will perish. It will be an awful thing to die just outside the gate of life. Almost saved, but altogether lost! This is the most terrible of positions. A man just outside Noah’s ark would have been drowned; a manslayer close to the wall of the city of refuge, but yet outside of it, would be slain; and the man who is within a yard of Christ, and yet has not trusted him, will be lost. Therefore am I in terrible earnest to get my hesitating friends over the threshold. “Come in! Come in!” is my pressing entreaty. “Why do you stand outside?” is my solemn enquiry’ (Spurgeon: *Wicket* vi-vii).

Fuller argued out the large consequences which follow the hyper-Calvinistic view of saving faith – that Christ died for me, and I was justified in eternity: ‘If this be saving faith, it must inevitably follow that it [saving faith] is *not* the duty of unconverted sinners; for they are not interested in Christ, and it cannot possibly be their duty to believe a lie. But if it can be proved that the proper object of saving faith is not our being interested in Christ’ – that is, if it can be proved from Scripture that sinners, in order to be saved, are not called upon to believe that Christ died for them in particular and has justified them – but ‘the proper object of saving faith is’ ‘the glorious gospel of the ever-blessed God (which is true, whether we believe it or not), a contrary inference must be drawn’ – that is, it *is* the duty of all sinners to believe the gospel – ‘for it is admitted, on all hands, that it is the duty of every man to believe what God reveals’. Of course, saving faith is more than believing the gospel, believing what God has said. But the principle stands. As can be proved (see Fuller: *Worthy*; my *Offer*), it *is* the duty of sinners savingly to believe; that is, it is the duty of sinners as sinners to repent and trust Christ. Therefore the hyper-Calvinistic view of faith is wrong.

As Fuller said: ‘By saving faith, we undoubtedly embrace Christ *for ourselves*... and it is for the forgiveness of *our* sins that we put our trust in him’; which is the biblical position. ‘But this is very different from a persuasion of our being in a state of salvation’ (Fuller: *Worthy* pp152-153, emphasis his) – that is, the hyper-Calvinistic position.

Owen: ‘Some... make [faith] to be a full persuasion of the forgiveness of our sins through the mediation of Christ; or, that what Christ did and suffered as our mediator, he did it for us in particular: and a particular application of especial mercy unto our own souls and consciences is hereby made the essence of faith; or, to believe that our own sins are forgiven seems hereby [that is, under hyper-Calvinistic teaching] to be the first and most proper act of justifying faith’. Gill’s position in a (fairly large) nutshell.

But this is wrong. This is not the *first* and *essential* thing sinners have to believe. This is entirely a matter for sinners (believers) *after* they have come to faith. The first and essential and only thing a sinner has to do is to repent and trust Christ. Furthermore, sinners are not commanded merely to believe facts – which is Sandemanianism. As I say, they have to trust Christ. And there is a very big difference between Sandemanianism and hyper-Calvinism, on the one hand, and the biblical position, on the other. Serious consequences follow a mistake here, said Owen. If the hyper-Calvinists are right, and saving faith is to be assured that I am elect and that Christ died for me in particular: ‘Hence it would follow that whosoever does not [so] believe, or has not a firm persuasion of the forgiveness of his own sins in particular, has no saving faith – is no true believer’. As Owen tersely observed: ‘Which is by no means to be admitted’. Of course not! Otherwise, any believer who had doubts about the matter would be demonstrating that he is not saved! In which case, one wonders why John the apostle wrote his first letter!

The fact is, as Owen pointed out, this hyper-Calvinistic notion confuses saving faith and assurance, even though, as Owen observed, the early Reformers, understandably recoiling from their struggle with Rome, sometimes tended to make this mistake. Witness Calvin: ‘Let this truth then stand sure – that no one can be called a son of God, who does not know himself to be such’ (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p301). Despite this, said Owen, ‘but yet... I never read any of them [the early Reformers] (I know not what others have done) who affirmed that every true and sincere believer has always had a full assurance of the especial love of God in Christ, or the pardon of his own sins’. Yet this must follow if assurance is the essence of saving faith. But as Owen pointed out – arguing from Isa. 50:10, (he could

have cited 1 John) – not all believers have this assurance. In any case, as he said: ‘The belief of the pardon of their own sins in particular... is not proposed unto [sinners] in the first preaching of the gospel’ (Owen: *Justification in Works* Vol.5 pp83-85,96).

Berkouwer traced out the disastrous effect of eternal justification on addresses to sinners: ‘Are we now to entangle ourselves in a subtle, scholastic puzzle about justification from eternity, an academic problem which promises only to remove us from the living reality of simple faith?... Theologians have at times played with this question as though it were an innocent speculation, and have done so to the pain and sorrow of the church’. What ‘pain and sorrow to the church’? Reader, if one is at all acquainted with any of the dear people who are enmeshed in such a system, the answer will be self-evident. Years and years – life-long in many cases – waiting, hoping, seeking, longing for this mysterious ‘manifestation’, this miraculous revelation, that I am one of the elect, and so can know that gospel invitations are for me, and that Christ died for me, and so on. The misery, the wasted locust-years, that this engenders... ‘Pain and sorrow to the church’ is right. But, as has been my concern throughout, think about the appalling damage caused to unbelievers when they are addressed by preachers under such a system.

Berkouwer went on: ‘The question [is] whether justification occurs completely in time, thus making sense of the phrase “justification through faith”, or whether it precedes faith as such and occurs in the eternity of God’s counsel. If the latter is true, it would still be possible to speak of a justification through faith in time, but the justification in time would be viewed only against the more profound and decisive background of justification in eternity. The issue – and it is necessary to keep this in mind – is not correctly proposed in the antithesis “justification in time *versus* justification from eternity”. Those who have taught justification from eternity have almost always insisted that this does not exclude justification through faith in time’.

Ah, but what do they mean by ‘being justified through faith’? As Berkouwer said, it does not, as they claim it does, ‘mean a mere eye-opener to the fact that one has already been justified’.

He went on: ‘This concept of eternal justification reveals how a speculative logic can invade a scriptural proclamation of salvation, and torture it beyond recognition. This is the danger of an apparently consistent logical process which at first imperceptibly, and then, quite finally, estranges itself from scriptural reality... The opponents of eternal justification [that is, duty-faith and free-offer preachers], no

matter how earnest their confession of eternal election, and withal the priority of grace, put the emphasis [where it belongs in biblical addresses to sinners] on the demand for faith, and are most articulate in their serious reminder of the urgent “call to believe”... Anyone who reads the Confessions [excluding the Gospel Standard Articles, and similar, of course] seriously knows that they insist upon the necessity of faith as well as [stating unequivocally] that faith in itself carries no merit’ (Berkouwer pp143-144,148,150,158).

Let me say a little more on how hyper-Calvinism leads to appalling consequences. Maurice Wiles’ comment on the testimony of his grandfather, Joseph Pitts Wiles, concerning the way he came to assurance, serves as an apt warning: ‘It would appear that it is rather the claimed self-authenticating nature of the experience itself that was at the heart of the assurance received. And therein lay a danger of which [Joseph] himself was soon to become aware. It was, he finds himself having to acknowledge, the experience, *instead of Christ*, that he had come to rest on’ (Wiles p25, emphasis mine). For a gracious personal statement on the added Articles, especially their practical consequences, see Houghton pp29-35. As I say, it is a gracious statement, but even Houghton rightly used such phrases as ‘alarming error’ and ‘these restricted and perverted views’.

Let me close with a biblical, heart-warming extract from Edwards: ‘I... invite those who are afraid of God’s wrath to come... How happy would you be if your hearts were but persuaded to close with Jesus Christ!... O be persuaded to hide yourself in Christ Jesus!... You will certainly be accepted of the Father if your soul lays hold of Jesus Christ... Justice and law will not be against you, if you are in Christ; that threatening... “die”... will not touch you. The majesty and honour of God are not against you. You need not be afraid but that you shall be justified if you come to him; there is an act of justification already past and declared for all who come to Christ by the resurrection of Christ, and as soon as ever you come, you are by that declared free. If you come to Christ, it will be a sure sign that Christ loved you from all eternity, and that he died for you; and you may be sure if he died for you, he will not lose the end [purpose] of his death, for the dispensation of life is committed unto him’ (Edwards p931).

Sinners must be commanded, urged and pressed to come to Christ. Let me return to an extract from Murray, and take it further: ‘Men come into the possession of reconciliation as actual status in [their] response to the gospel proclamation. This is made clear in 2 Cor. 5:18-20... What constitutes this proclamation is that which God has done in the death of his Son, and the essence of the exhortation is that we [sinners]

should enter into this status which the once-for-all [time] accomplishment has secured... The ground of faith in answer to the exhortation is the reality of that objective accomplishment in the concreteness of the historical event of Christ's death upon the cross. So the distinctiveness of the once-for-all reconciling action in Jesus' blood is not only involved in the ministry and word of reconciliation; it is involved in the very act of faith by which we enter into reconciled status and enjoy peace with God... It is all-important and most significant that the exhortation correspondent with [corresponding to] the message is: "Be reconciled to God", an exhortation which surely implies that reconciliation as a status, as one of peace with God, does not take effect until there is the response of faith. This is another reminder that we may not abstract the accomplished action from its fruitage in reconciliation bestowed, a bestowment always conjoined with the faith that responds to the message proclaimed' (Murray: *Collected* Vol.4 pp111-112).

Putting it more simply and directly: Until the sinner believes, he is not reconciled. The great business of the sinner is to obey Christ in the gospel. The same goes for justification. The great business of the preacher when addressing sinners with the gospel is to call them, to press them, to urge them, to invite them, to exhort them, to command them, to seek to persuade them to come to Christ at once.

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